

Hugo Award Nominee

ABORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

Tales of the Human Kind

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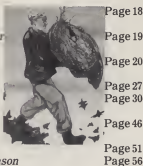
Phillip C. Jennings



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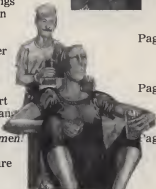
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- \$8.95

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with illustrations
by Lee Moyer

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SEPTEMBER 1988

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STARBLAZE NEWSLETTER**



ART: LEE MOYER

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Good Neighbor

By Patricia Anthony

Art by Cortney Skinner

I don't care what anybody says, he was a good neighbor. He moved in next door the summer that Acme Feed and Grain burnt down. He moved in kinda quiet-like with just a van coming up to his place. None of his people helped him.

Maxie made him a cake like he was just any of the new neighbors we've had in the last forty years. I got real irritated at that, partly because I wasn't sure I wanted anything to do with him.

"A cake?" I asked her like I never seen one in my life. "You're making him a cake? Don't you know who he is?"

"Reckon I seen him once or twice in the papers. Might have seen him on TV talking before the UN." When Maxie decided to let something I said roll off her, she could be varnished rock.

"Well, how do you know he can eat chocolate cake?" I asked her, real sarcastic.

"How do you know he can't?"

And that was that. She had stuck them toothpicks all up to the top of that cake and wrapped wax paper around it like she always done to keep the midgies out of the icing. She picked up the plate, and with me trotting behind her like a spring lamb, we walked the half mile or so of pasture over to his place.

When I think of him, I remember him sitting on that damned ratty lawn chair of his, a drink teetering beside him on the grass, with that look on his face he'd sometimes get like he could see real far, past where I could look. Recollecting about it now, I'm always in that picture, too, sitting in that idiot overstuffed chair he'd got in some flea market, a beer in my hand. I was used to him by then.

But that first time I seen him, I remember thinking that he was taller and bluer than I'd expected. I knew they were blue, but I always pictured them blue like a blue tick hound, where they're kind of gray with a blue cast to them. Or blue like a blue roan horse. He wasn't blue like that. He was the color of a plover's egg or a real clear spring sky. That's how he was blue. Let me tell you, you don't get no idea over television. None at all.

He was so blue and so tall and skinny that I didn't see how touched he must have been. It was a lot later before I thought of that. He stood there in the door and sort of looked down at that damned cake for a long time and didn't say nothing. He just looked. And then them skinny hands of his came out and grabbed the edges of the plate, careful not to put his hands against

Maxie's, not 'cause he was fearful of touching her, but because, he told me later, he didn't want to scare her away. His face lit up like a Christmas tree with a smile a mile wide and he said, "Chocolate," in that oboe voice of his. He was a pure demon for chocolate.

He liked all of Maxie's cakes. My favorite was the apple-sauce with the sour-cream icing, and he liked that one, too. But from then on whenever she made the chocolate, I knewed it was half for him.

He'd come over every once in a while, and you'd have to watch for him real good, 'cause he wouldn't hallo the house like another neighbor might have done. He'd just stand in the yard in the rain or the sun till we noticed him. Sometimes I'd come in from the barn and there he'd be, and I'd get to wondering how long he'd been waiting. Much as we told him to come to the door and knock, he never done it. I figured he might have been too shy, and he thought sometimes we might not want him there. Once I told him it bothered me. I pictured us over to town and him standing in the yard for hours. It didn't make me feel any better when he told me he looked for our car.

"Car might be in the shop," I told him.

He looked at me with that odd, settled expression and said, "Then I will not wait. I will go home."

"But you might want for something, and I'm here. Should come up and knock so you know for sure."

"I can't do that, no matter how much you wish it. For us it is a sin, bothering people. It's greater than the sin of stealing."

"You got any religious pamphlets I can give them magazine salesmen when they come by?" I asked.

"No," he said real serious before he realized I was joshing. Then he laughed right along with me.

It was only when he said stuff like that that I remembered how different we were. Things would go on just fine, and I'd be thinking of him just as human as anybody else, then he'd say something like that and I'd remember. Like I said, when I got used to that blue, I didn't see it no more.

Had a thing for vodka and Dr. Pepper, only he'd always add sugar and one of them bottled red cherries just for the pretty. Had a sweet tooth, that one. Kept Oreo cookies in a glass jar in his kitchen. Kept some pretzels in a glass jar and beer in the fridge, too, but that was for me, 'case I'd come calling.

We'd go out to his yard or on his porch if it was raining, and he'd bring out the Oreo jar and set it by him and the pretzel jar and set it by me. He'd make



WERNER
1972

one of them vodka drinks for himself and reach in his refrigerator and bring me out a beer. He was real thoughtful that way.

Everyone's house always smells a little strange, mostly from what's cooked there. His smelled stranger than most, but it didn't smell particularly bad. There was a hint of oregano in it, and something sugary, too. Once, when he was real drunk, he told me my house smelled of fresh baked bread and cookies. Said he just liked standing in my kitchen watching Maxie at the stove. Said it made him feel good, not like he was home, but good all the same.

I asked him why he didn't go back, since he was retired and all. What I didn't get into was why in the world he put up with the little sidelong stares he got in town. Couldn't go to the hardware store without causing some kind of quiet commotion. People seen him coming and they just stopped in their tracks.

He said I wouldn't understand, but he couldn't go back because he loved home so bad.

"I want to remember the way it was in here," he told me, tapping one of them long bony fingers against his skull. "To me, my trip only lasted three years, but more went by on my planet. What I miss is a home that existed over one hundred years ago, not the planet that is there now. When I knew I had to go," he said as he stretched his legs against the torn plastic mesh of the lawn chair, "I started to memorize things I knew I would miss. When I got here, I mourned for a long time. I would remember those mind photographs I had taken of things and sometimes I would become lost in them. Then, in about five years, I adapted. I love home, still; but I love it as I would someone who is now dead. Home is dead for me, Billy. I've buried it."

He might have killed it in his mind, but his heart never forgot. That long stare at night was to one particular light in the sky.

"Why didn't you retire up there to New York where all your other people are staying?" I asked. I was expecting to hear that he didn't like the city, that it was too smelly and crowded for him, but he didn't say none of that.

"I am retired," he said instead. "I would not be welcome in their community. It was expected that I would return home. I embarrass them."

It was spring when some of his people came to visit. Maxie and me seen them drive up the road. Two humans, important ones by the looks of them three-piece suits, stayed around the car. The two others went on inside. They stayed a long time and I almost expected to see him leave with them, but he didn't. He stayed put.

"Friends come to see you," I said as I took a long pull of my can of Schlitz.

"Yes," he said. He wasn't real conversational that evening.

We sat there for a while, him looking down into that drink of his instead of up to the sky. Moths tapped against the porch light.

I slapped at my arm. "Wet spring."

"Yes."

"Lots of skeeters."

He didn't say nothing.

"Skeeters don't bother you, do they?"

"They don't want me to stay here," he said all of a sudden, and I knew he wasn't talking about skeeters.

It was my turn to look at him. I could see a lot of reason in what he'd said, but I still didn't like it much.

"You staying anyway?" I asked.

"Yes, Billy. I'm staying anyway, but not for the reason you think."

I recall it was a real dark night and real clear. Off to the east, down by the creek, I could hear the Harlemons' coon dog baying. A little breeze kicked up and rattled the leaves in the pecan trees near the porch.

"I'm dying," he said.

I was looking at him when he said that. About then I couldn't look at him no more.

"Not that I'm sick," he explained, "but because I won't change any more. I'm tired of changing. Of course being tired has very little to do with it. I've had a lot of lives. A great many lives. The people who came to see me?"

He expected some answer, so I said, "Yeah?"

"They don't understand because they're so much younger. They believe I'm being dramatic." He chuckled a little at that. "But they pointed out that, if I do die, my soul would become stuck here, so far from home. They say I would spend eternity among strangers. What do you think?"

The question shocked me, but I answered anyway. "I always figured your God's same as ours. Never thought about it much, but I don't see that it's any problem, dying here or dying there. Dead's dead."

"Yes, Billy. I think so, too. Dead's dead. Tell me, if they're right, if I don't die, but change instead, will I frighten you?"

That question sort of raised the hair on the back of my neck. I should have said more, but I just told him no. I didn't know what he was talking about, but I couldn't imagine him scaring me. I couldn't imagine that.

"You're a good man, Billy," he said.

Of the three of us, it was Maxie who went first. I recollect I come out of the barn one winter afternoon and seen her. There was about an inch of snow on the ground, and I wondered what the hell she was doing and if she wasn't blamed cold lying there. When I come running up to her side, I seen she was cold. Cold as ice. I just sat back on my haunches and looked at her. It took me a while to realize she was dead.

Now it's a funny thing, but I always figured I'd go first. So I guess in the little parcel of time I stood in the door of the barn and the while I sat on my haunches feeling the snow steal the heat out of my legs, I couldn't believe she was dead just cause I didn't have no reference point for it.

He made me mad cause he didn't go by the funeral home. Didn't go to the service, neither. And when everybody in town come by the house for pound cake and potato salad, I expected to see him there, but he never showed.

I buried Maxie in the family plot on our land right next to Mama and Daddy. From the back door you can see down to the wrought-iron fencing under the oak. It was better. Made me feel less lonely, 'cause I could

still see her grave from the kitchen. The kitchen was the one place she belonged.

Damned if the day after the funeral I didn't look down there and see him kneeling by her marble angel in the sleet. I was feeling pretty punky about then, so I didn't go down there to talk to him. Didn't feel like talking to nobody. Come back in the kitchen about two hours later to make me some coffee and seen he was gone.

I visited her the next day. Damn if he hadn't made her a chocolate cake. Sleet'd gotten to it, and a few of the braver ants were having a field day. I left it. A week or so later it was pretty well gone.

I took the plate back to him.

"Washed it for you," I said when he opened the door.

He looked down at me with them silvery eyes of his and took the plate without word one.

"Appreciate it," I told him.

"It's nothing," he said. Then he added, "It is a custom of ours to leave with the dead the one thing that symbolized them."

I sort of looked at the plate where he was holding it in them blue hands. "Thank you," I said. Then I said, "I think you caught her. I think you caught her good. Seemed like she loved to bake cause she knowed people liked it. She wasn't nothing grand. I know that. But she was a good, solid woman. Somebody you could

count on."

"Someone to count on," he said thoughtfully. "I'm not sure, but that may well be a grand thing. Are you going to be all right?"

Instead of answering like I should have, I sort of started to cry.

He didn't touch me or nothing, not like a human might have. Didn't say nothing, neither, least not for a while. Didn't say as how the Lord works in mysterious ways or how it was a blessing she was took so quick. Or how she was in some better place. He just stood there. But, you know, it was kind of funny how comfortable he made me feel. Maybe his just standing there made me know death was a natural thing and not nothing to go excusing away.

After a while he asked if I wanted to stay for dinner, and I said no. He asked if I had other plans, and I said no. Then he said as how if I didn't have no other plans, it didn't make sense to go back to the house cause I probably wouldn't eat. I said I wasn't hungry. He said I probably was, I just didn't know it yet.

So I come on in. He got out two frozen Mexican food dinners and popped them into the microwave. By the time they were ready I was hungry. Ate all of mine and half of his, too. He built a fire in the fireplace and I stayed so late and got so drunk that about three o'clock in the morning he threw a blanket over me and

(Continued to page 60)

A Long Time Ago ...

Before taking charge at *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, our editor, Charles C. Ryan, was the editor of *Galileo*, a science fiction magazine published in the mid-1970s. During his tenure there, he helped discover a number of new writers who have since gone on to win Nebula and/or Hugo awards, writers such as Connie Willis, John Kessel, Lewis Shiner and more.

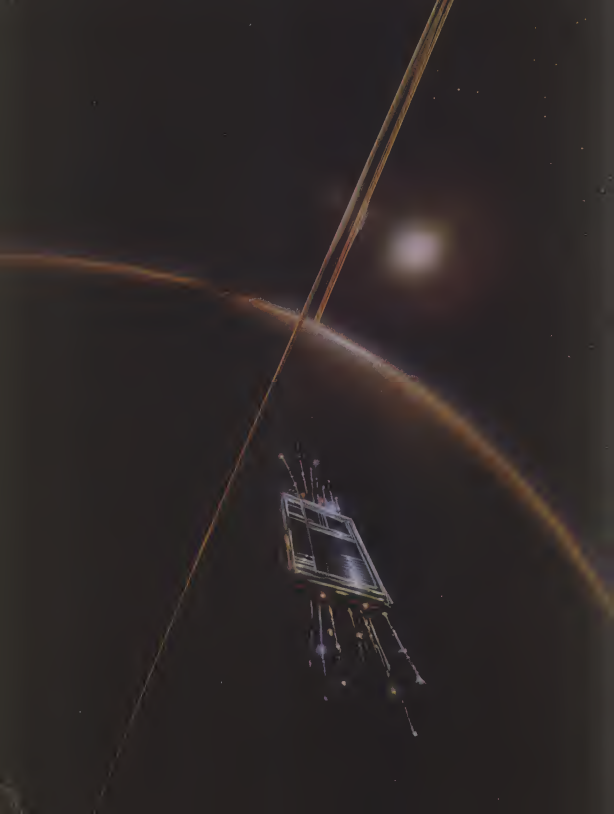
Now, on his behalf, we'd like to give you an opportunity to see some of the best stories he collected a decade ago.

Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo (St. Martin's Press, 1979) features 12 stories by the following authors: Harlan Ellison, Brian Aldiss, Alan Dean Foster, Connie Willis, John Kessel, Kevin O'Donnell Jr., D.C. Poyer, M. Lucie Chin, Joe L. Hensley & Gene DeWeese, John A. Taylor, Gregor Hartmann, and Eugene Potter.

For a limited time, while copies last, you can purchase a first-edition hardcover copy of *Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo* for \$10, plus \$1 postage and handling. If you would like your copy autographed by the editor, please indicate how you would like the note to read.

To order, send \$11 for each copy to: *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, Book Dept., P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.





Doctor Quick

By Phillip C. Jennings

Art by Bob Eggleton

The job of a small utility called DRUNKARDS-WALK was to lurch through white radio hiss, plucking bytes at irregular intervals. The routine it served strung them together, then ran them through decryption.

Decryption passed the result to ENGLISH-SEMANTICS. The translated message could have been assigned to a number of devices consistent with the late 1920s. In this case it clattered out of a gleaming brass ticker-tape machine.

"CODE BLUE FROM VASHTARSKI'S FREE BUG APPARATUS. Now hear this: Doctor Quick but do not alter course. Doctor Quick but make no response UNLESS ABLE TO FILTER INPUT OR GO DEAD-EARS. We have a UNETAO virus on the shelf with its victim. DQ destination by the book: Great Bend, Montana."

I twirled my pearls, gazed pensively out the French windows, took a drag on my cigarette.... "If UNETAO hears that and watches me, we'll have to publish a new code book," I told my house guests.

Alf, Reggie and Winnie stood by the machine, a trio of sleek upper-class clubmen. "Montana? That's the Teleso wormworks," Alf muttered, clipping the end of a Havana Supreme.

Winnie shook his large head. He heaved past the billiard table to the brandy decanter. "Computer viruses, tiny self-replicating programs overlaying vast areas of memory with copies of themselves. Whoever caught it won't have much soul left."

I turned and stubbed out my cigarette, my skin strikingly black in a cream-white flapper costume, twice startling in polished Avencrest Manor. "I can't have you doing my thinking," I spoke. "If you'll excuse me...."

I ran a backup command to copy the whole scene — drapes, sideboard and shooting trophies — into off-line storage. Fictoids were fun and useful for a solo bug's sanity, but they tended to overreach themselves, as if I were merely the boss of a household that ran my body.

That body was the size of a Harley-Davidson, not counting two kilometer-huge wings. My soul sat sandwiched in a model C 520 cassette. A volume smaller than Alf's cigar box held more than enough room to store a life's worth of human memories, room for mail, current-events databases, a few favorite fictoids, and a series of my own holo sculptures.

I kept more fictoids shelved where time never passed. Thrashed at whim between core and memory, my companions were ill equipped to deal with realtime. I found it a bit nerve-racking myself. The nearest UNETAO laser launcher was eight light-seconds away, a weapon they might use to burn holes in my sails, because to shift course now was to prove myself in league with Vashtarski's Apparatus.

I needed five minutes to furl those sails. How long before they noticed changes in my butterfly profile? Ten seconds, twenty....

A slight burst from thruster four — NOW!

Almost a disappointment not to hear bullets whistle past my ears. The enemy was seconds slower than I anticipated. Perhaps I'd slipped off their watch list, or maybe they were still deciphering Vashtarski's message.

Or maybe — four years of recent data gave a .31 probability they were just being nice. Insidious bug niceness kept our Apparatus from true revolution; the same war-weary thoughtfulness increasingly enlightened the oppressor's policies. But nice or not they were too late, because now Saturn's orb occluded UNETAO Hunterbase. I fired again, changing course while reducing my profile toward invisibility. So much junk around the sixth planet, and so many microships — I could relax. In this swarm chances were .98 they'd never catch me.

The problem with furling my wings was lack of juice. I solved that by paging out all but one second per minute. Subjectively my speed shot up, objectively my thoughts slowed; a dangerous tactic when UNETAO had so recently unveiled another weapon.

Radio-propagated viruses wiped souls and left hardware unharmed. I revised my ideas about niceness. The game was suddenly nasty, and very ungamelike.

*"Oh, rich man want your body,
Rich man he can pay,
Rich man snatch your body,
Poor man run away!"*

Decades ago masses of undesirables *couldn't* run. Worse, they cost tax money to feed and guard. Soon the first wave of Earth's convicts were exiled from their flesh and launched on a variety of space missions.

About that time the contents of my felonious brain were copied into a box. Someone got my black

woman's body — I hope he was racist and chauvinist, and none of his bigot friends would talk to him. I wish I hadn't been careful. The thought of endowing him with genital herpes....

I was "Captain" Juba then, not imagining I'd ever be "Doctor."

Captain Juba, nee Nicole Dreyfont, a kid from one of Philadelphia's best neighborhoods, grown into a back-to-Africa black nationalist willing to break any law to raise money for the cause. Trucked east to Kenya, what was left of me was laser-kicked into the skies. I was netted by Low Earth Orbiter, given my microchip body and a pep talk, and then launched for Saturn. After four year's sleep I woke to stretch my wings and begin my fifty-year sentence.

All the guilts that drove me out of Philadelphia no longer burned. In Africa I strove against white hegemonism, but now I could admit my love for the whitest form of fiction: the English detective story. Black loyalty gave way to colorless logic: I was silicon-rational, a trivial intellect until I found a new obsession. Meanwhile my life was like gyrating through an Esther Williams water ballet. How many convicts in polar orbits, converging twice per cycle, then spinning out again? Hello, goodbye, hello again....

Our every sweep plunged through a hundred-meter kill zone, a thinned-out extension of Saturn's rings. Telescopes told UNETAO it was empty, but we were here to acquire data, and our data said otherwise. We tried to persuade UNETAO of the dangers. While they dragged their feet Mohammed disappeared. Then Grazia showed up as a constellation of off-course shrapnel. If we weren't friends I might not have noticed, the math was that difficult.

On Earth a child catches a ball and solves a two-body problem. Such equations grow more complex with each new element. I had myself to think of, and Saturn, and the sun; also twenty classical moons. Add rings and supply depots and then try to keep track of even a handful of acquaintances. Tricky. I started writing the software. So did others in my dance troupe.

Spartakos Vashtarski coded the most efficient program. Soon I juggled 64 bodies in my head — I made them go *faster than realtime*, and anticipated disasters. Pretty good for a gigaprocessor; in those days not even UNETAO could do better.

In those days we had no Apparatus, just trial-and-error electronic surgeons willing to remove UNETAO bombs from prisoners' braincases, and give them voluntary control over their sleep-wake cycles so they could take evasive action in an emergency. *No more like Grazia!* I risked my life thimblerrigging from bug to bug, bestowing the beginnings of freedom. How many weapons had UNETAO fielded since then, to keep that freedom from becoming absolute?

And now this virus! After twelve footloose years I had no intention of getting infected. My bag of tricks held no input filters, so I went dead-ears, then contemplated the hours of subjective time before my arrival on Telesco.

Boredom loves company. I reloaded AVENCREST.

I slunk into the room, gloriously conscious of my simulated flesh, my toothy smile and tastefully sheathed black muscle. My men turned to look. "We're on our way," I announced.

The skies outside my English country house were clouded. To reinforce the minimalism the calendar showed the maid's day off. Avencrest Manor echoed with emptiness, the furniture in the Great Hall was sheeted over.

It began to rain. Reggie moved to the window and sighed. "So they kill people on purpose now."

I shrugged. "We don't count as people. Bugs. Dead souls in revolt."

"It's got to change," Winnie rumbled across the room. "They'll see reason back on Earth if you keep from feeding their wetbrain paranoia —"

"Paranoia?" I laughed. "In my previous life I smuggled deathvices out of Africa's A-zone. I've converted to Miss Ethics of 2045, but why should they believe me when I flout their rules?"

"Not everyone on Earth hates bugs," Alf pointed out. "Free Freak Texas —"

"— lasted three years before the Liberty Gospelers marched in." Reggie blew a smoke ring and then continued. "Wet hormones versus cold decision-theory, but what you call ethical self-interest, wet-brains call gutlessness. They even find it a *sinister* gutlessness. Now they beam viruses. Isn't it time your revolution went onto the offensive?"

"Sinister? Do you pretend to understand human behavior?" I responded. "My brain was as wet as they come. All you are is a few authors' imaginations!"

Reggie's face hardened. "Perhaps we're less than human," he answered. "Well and good, we're not talking humans. We're talking about the mob, that thing of lowest common denominators that votes for anyone they like. Maybe I *do* understand them, Doctor!"

With these words he stalked off. Alf followed while Winnie heaved forward. "Please don't mind —"

I sat. "Damn! I should apologize. Winnie, some day you fictoids — I mean, here I am, Tom Jefferson yapping about bug liberty and whupping my fictoid slaves."

"We're mirrors," Winnie demurred. "That's why Free Freak Texas radioed us out here, for the sake of your sanity. We let you exercise behaviors — at the moment, anger and sorrow."

"Yeah. Why can I still feel, Winnie? I *do* feel moods, just a little. I'm a puppet cut loose from my glangular strings. Why do I keep dancing?"

One of Winnie's flaws was a tendency to answer impossible questions. "Doctor, I'm a sizable pack of software, but your soul has me trumped. Anyhow, nobody's going to do a trace analysis, seeing humans are so different that it's hard to reach any general conclusions."

A dead-end pause. Winnie hadn't fielded that well. He sounded almost ... pompous. I changed the subject. "All UNETAO has to do is catch me once."

"Not necessarily. They caught Magda." Winnie laughed as he shambled to the brandy.

Why do I keep a harem of white men? I asked myself. And why do they get boozy on me? "Magda

was special — that'll never happen again," I answered.

"That's right. Colonel Hudson lands on Janus loaded for bear, and she drops a rock on him! Haw! Except some think he was the special one — especially dumb!"

I steeled myself, rose and moved close. "Do you want me to fix you?" I asked. "There's time before Teleso."

"Fix me?" Winnie turned.

My gaze fell, drawn to his glass. "You keep drinking."

"Booze and blubber," Winnie grumbled, emptying the decanter. "I'm not a happy man. I'm not Pickwick."

"Nevertheless you're a good advisor. Look, I won't interfere—"

"You don't have a degree in psycho-neurocybernetics. It's not like there's a field labeled ALCOHOL QUOTIENT with a bit you can flip." Winnie slugged down a mouthful of brandy. "You're getting tired of me."

"No. Just the opposite," I lied, thinking that AVENCREST was just as interminable as the *Masterpiece Theatre* series that inspired it. I'd spent five weeks here (stretched over God knew how many years) and hadn't figured out where the plot was going. Romance? Mystery? Did I have to act like an Edwardian lady to trigger some action? In despair I killed the scenario: *Control-C*.

I'll live without drunk white fictoids for a while. Ahead lay Teleso, and whichever free bugs rode herd on the wormfarm. I reviewed the book. "Montana" was a 25-kilometer moon, and Great Bend was a deep trench walled off from the worms: soon the location of an Apparatus mass-driver.

How many bugs would come to Vashtarski's call for help? Enough to make UNETAO suspicious? Would they send Colonel Hudson's bounty hunters, or beam radio viruses in hopes a few ears were open?

I found it strange to fly deaf. Was this an ambush? At random I chose ten objects and projected their courses. They were easy to see wings out, innocent Uncle Toms with nothing to fear from UNETAO.

No — some were Toms, others were decoys: bombs implanted to take out hunters when they coiled up too close. Except not even Colonel Hudson was that stupid, so the Apparatus gave them a second function. Thanks to a program called TECHNOFLUFF, if I dared listen I'd hear them buzz about "Unhydraulic Stasis" and "Osmic Function Betatron Translocators," whispering urgent spec revisions for "Iso-conic Wave Amplitude Oscillators," and "Directional Gravity Valves." Easy to clutter UNETAO's processors with feasibility studies on non-existent bug technology, sometimes drawing the enemy out on futile strikes — easy to exhaust them with alarms and boasts until they shrugged off mere "Doctor Quicks."

By chance my projected course drew within five clicks of one of Teleso's orbiters. It looked ... different. Odd flexibilities, a newer design — had it seen me? I was cold and small, and I'd slide in under its wing-shadow. Perfect. One tiny thrust....

I shifted to tenth time, sucked battery and flexed

my insect legs. Was it blaring messages on a dozen frequencies? I didn't dare listen. I matched course with my prey, closer, closer....

In full realtime four legs grappled the other bug. My front pair extruded whiskerwire swords. Two slashes and my victim's wings fell free. I snatched them while my data cable snaked into my victim's option connector. "Surrender! Friend or foe?"

"I'm nobody's enemy," came the answer.

"Ears off, sucker. There's a virus around. How long you been out around Saturn?"

"Look, if you're a rebel and you want sympathy, give me my wings."

"First let me look at your head." I topped off with stolen juice and popped my victim out of his slot. A few minutes later — "Be grateful. They don't even bother with bombs anymore. You're new by your hardware. What's your mission?"

A standard human figure took shape in one of my partitions. "Look, UNETAO sent me to check out the worms and see what you folks were up to. That's all, no harm meant. You're paranoid about those guys, but they've been trying to de-escalate for years now. Ever since Colonel Hudson's debacle the cowboy faction has had egg on their faces."

"Debacle"? Fancy English for a convict."

"I'm no convict. I volunteered for this mission. You Apparatus bugs have friends on Earth. It's taken us till now to get here."

"Friends of the Apparatus and friends of UNETAO? More propaganda. A bug down on Teleso gave ears to UNETAO propwash and now he's dead."

The holo androgynous smiled and shifted malewards, taking on features. "Your attitudes are four years out of date. It's a new game now, peace-makers versus the warmongers. Someone's beaming viruses just to stir things up."

"I'll believe that when —"

THUNK!

A bug knows no halfway between sleep and waking, no fitful drift toward full awareness. After an unguessed interval of time, my mind flipped ON. I found myself in a dark glacial crevasse. The slit to my right showed into an ice-and-soot canyon, gibbous Saturn less than four radii away, ice-cream orange, yellow and white, but ghostly, no brighter than Earth's full moon.

I was shelved, popped out of my wing-ship sheath, immobile and helpless. Someone moved close on pogo-stick legs and plugged into my connector. "Sorry, we had to do a sweep. No radio so we couldn't tell who was jumping who."

The voice profile was familiar. "Spartakos? Spartakos Vashtarski! What have you done with my body?"

"We've got a storeful of bodies, Doctor Juba. Take your pick. It's the least I can do after treating you like this."

He plucked me up and carried my cassette deeper into the cave. I chose a familiar microship sheath, hairline scars where its wings were cut away, then vacuum-fused. "A young idealist," I muttered. "Let's all shake hands and love each other."

"And now he's on the shelf," Vashtarski answered as he slid me into the slot. "We've a collection of idealists, fresh from Earth. They seem sincere; they bring messages and gifts."

"And what about my patient?"

"We need estimates — when it happened, and how long it took to kill him this badly. You won't be his first doctor, we've got a committee. It meets third shift to talk over some questions. Here, follow me — oh, one more thing. We've got house rules and production schedules on Telesto, we're not flits like you spaceborne souls. No fasttime during your shift, no fictoid fantasies. Let's set a good example, huh? After all, it's only a day or two."

Like telling an alcoholic not to drink, I grumbled to myself. Except —

— Except with fictoid after fictoid I'd entered into relationships until things got uncomfortable. Now my library was used up; nowhere escapist to go, neither sixth-century China nor twentieth-century England. Canned arguments sat waiting to happen — I needed my fictoids, but I couldn't unwind with them.

So why not do without Winnie for awhile? "Talk to me, Spartakos," I wheedled. "Tell me, how's workaday life among the worms of Telesto?"

"No life among the worms — we've got them walled off. You and me are the food they're programmed to eat, concentrated metal, silicon, and germanium."

"Uh —"

"— you see the weapons possibility?" Spartakos continued. "Worms are to hardware what viruses are to souls: they eat, and grow, and turn food into new larvae. Land a few on Janus. They start feeding, then multiplying and moving out, some prospering in sun, some stalled in shadow. At first they'd be ridiculously vulnerable. Only after they bred into the hundreds of thousands would they become threatening."

"Janus? Where Colonel Hudson —"

"Colonel Hudson, first among warmongers. The same Colonel who's trumpeted for rescue ever since Magda bashed him. He can't move, or if he can it's a complicated business; pieces strung out over the moonscape — he can't move *fast*. Prime food for worms."

"So you think he programmed this virus?" I asked.

"The new enlightened UNETAO doesn't want war — they're willing to turn the Outer System over to the Apparatus: a self-governing bug prison. Hudson's the kind of jerk who sees this as selling out. He'd do anything to stop it, and the only thing in his power —"

"— is radio. Viruses stuck in with his squawks for help." In my new body I scuttled after Spartakos' jolting form, folding my telescoped wings tightly behind me. "Ah, here's the victim."

Spartakos touched the cassette's option connector. "That insert's a throughput filter. It buffers any transmission and tests for malignancy. You couldn't catch this virus if you wanted to."

"Do you have more of these? Whoever interrogates Colonel Hudson will need one."

"Yes. But before we launch that mission — here. You try to figure it out."

I tapped in and ran through my dead patient's logs. I loaded his simulacrum and ran time backwards. I studied bits of virus to fix their multiplication rate, then estimated their current population. That population stopped growing the moment he'd been shelved, enabling me to solve for time and discover the moment of infection.

Puzzling, but no. He'd been a bad boy....

*** **

Saturn dimmed to half-phase and slid from the sky. Bug-spawned worms continued to remake the surface of tiny Telesto, growing and splitting, someday to be harvested for the ores concentrated in their bodies. A 20-klick wall sealed off Great Bend enclave, a region of crevasses strung with antennae, radomes, work-tables, transmission lines and the beginnings of a mass-driver. All this artificiality, and storage space for shelved souls and mobility sheaths, but nothing a human would recognize as simply a *room*. The third-shift meeting took place anyhow, via closed-cable, as if Great Bend were one vast roofless hall.

"There's been viral damage to the log," I reported when my time came to speak. "But I have evidence that our victim disregarded local rules and entertained himself with fictoids. Masking against my own library I've found bits of Judge Dee, Reggie Van Pelt and Captain Hornblower. This is a clue to his character: some chance he may also have passed fast-time."

The occasion needed drama. "That's important," I continued after a one-two pause. "Given the rate of viral multiplication he couldn't have been infected from Janus — Janus wasn't in the local sky. Only if he'd slowed processing to a one-tenth rate, say from boredom, could Colonel Hudson be the culprit."

"Which does *not* amount to exoneration," Vashtarski answered.

"The log was damaged," I repeated. "I find no realtime benchmarks. I don't know the source of your Colonel Hudson theory, but he's grown into a folklore figure, and while it remains a possibility —"

A new voice entered the circuit. "He brought bounty hunters to Saturn! He promised a militant wet faction that he was going to 'clean up this mess!' He came with projectiles, gauss guns, pulse weapons, magsticks — he set up Hunterbase as a citadel of oppression!"

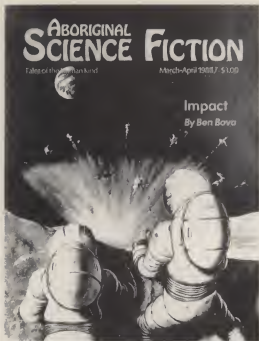
"Hudson's certainly an avenue to explore," I conceded. "But let's not blind ourselves to other possibilities."

"I see one other possibility, that UNETAO's recent enlightenment is a sham," Spartakos responded. "But if this were a trick they'd get our trust, and then broadcast this virus omnidirectionally on all frequencies! Instead there's only one victim. Now that we're manufacturing ear filters it's a wasted weapon."

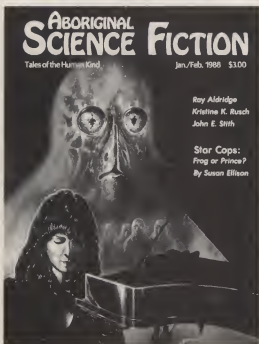
It was Spartakos' turn to pause dramatically. "Doctor Juba, we need someone to go to Janus, someone to serve as Hudson's judge and, if need be, executioner. Someone without my prejudices against him, and someone with years of solo experience."

"A flit," I joked.

"No one doubts your competence. That puts you toward the top of our list. Will you take the job? Will



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you interview Colonel Hudson? We guarantee you'll be protected. You'll have worms for insurance."

Of course I agreed; my way of being useful. Space was my element, Apparatus moonlife was too confining. If I ever settled on a moon it would be my *own* moon, no matter how small. I'd learn psychoneurocybernetics and set up a fictoid library. Microships would visit ... but first we needed peace. Whoever stood in the way of peace would have to be silenced — Colonel Hudson, or anyone else.

Teleso was small enough, a human might almost throw a ball into orbit. I was *much* bigger than a ball, with surgical enhancements and fresh tubes of fuel banded around my torso, but a catapult did the job. I fired my brakes, lost momentum, and spiraled in.

Janus is a mere 1.5 radii from Saturn. Its orbit confines the more famous rings, and it's certainly close enough to get ring-dirty. At one time it and smaller Epimetheus were one satellite, impacted and cracked by house-sized boulders, then pulled apart by Saturn's tug. Now they share the same two orbits, a single orbit nearly, doing do-si-do around each other when the inner one catches up with the outer — and trading places! In twelve years I'd become a Saturn chauvinist: what other planet boasted moons like this?

I'd take my chances with dirt. Some bugs *live* in the rings. Statistics will kill them, of course, just like statistics have written off six million Californians in that improbably overdue earthquake. Still the fools shrug at doom. For a few days I'd share their risks.

Meanwhile I stretched my wings and paged fast-time. During second shift I'd made some black-market swaps down on Teleso, and picked up new scenarios — should I check them out? CLIPPER promised to wake my appetites. "*Food and sex are the most fundamental of wildlife needs, and while you resonate to the thrills of Fu-Ahn's life you cannot be dead yourself...*"

It was a used scenario, far advanced along its plot line. As Fu-Ahn I'd "remember" things another bug chose to do, options I'd have played differently. Still —

LOAD CLIPPER GO

I woke in a Yankee Captain's stateroom, and in his bed. I knew nothing about the ship I was on — for all the years of this, my captivity, I'd been his girl-toy, and in all that time I'd done nothing to learn his foreign devil language.

I was Chinese, and fat. My feet were bound and I'd long since attained such bulk as to make it impossible for me to walk. As I lay under the Captain's covers I wondered just how big I was, like a tree adding rings season by season, a new ring of girth every time a customer ran this scenario.

Then too I wondered when the steward would bring the next in a series of meals, because that's *why* I was fat. Captain's orders, and as a Chinese slave brought up in starvation I'd always been delighted to oblige.

I wriggled, and shifted my blankets. Oh Mama, I was round as a ball! I tried to raise a bandaged foot so I could see it, and watched myself shake and dimple

enormously. Damn, talk about problems — how did I get out of this? How, in terms of the scenario?

I frowned. In terms of the scenario Fu-Ahn didn't *want* to escape. Her indoor pallor cinched it — she was beautiful, and lucky. Another meal soon, and then the captain's afternoon visit. Food and sex: all that the scenario advertised. Still, as I hit *Control-C* I felt I'd been cheated.

Or taught a lesson. I agreed with Spartakos Vashatarski: I'd just wasted precious time. Why not use my brain scheming against UNETAO? Why not figure out Colonel Hudson's psychology? He'd lain smashed on Janus for four years — now *that* was a puzzle! Why hadn't his bounty hunters answered his cries for rescue and brought him home to Hunterbase?

Because they smelled a trap?

Because another UNETAO faction hostile to Hudson had taken control?

Because they didn't *like* their Colonel?

Janus' day resonated with that of Epimetheus. Saturn tried to ruin the choreography: slow both rotations, spin out both orbits. In time the planet would succeed, in a future distant enough to be irrelevant. I wanted to touch down beyond the horizon from Colonel Hudson, and not get shot at. Epimetheus' present behavior was crucial to my plans.

A 200-kilometer diameter isn't quite enough to force gravitational rounding, and Janus had historical reasons to be shaped like a fragment. A poet might describe it as a tumbling mountain — not a very original poet, because Janus was merely the biggest of Saturn's satellite mountains, a peak grander than Kilimanjaro welded to a lumphish base.

Colonel Hudson lay splat on one slope of that mountain. From the far side I could crawl close before exposing myself. Very well, time to set things in motion. I fired my thrusters, then paged out again.

A lot of hours zipped by in the next few subjective minutes. I spun in like a record played at 78 rpm, landing lightly on Epimetheus. As an artifact I glittered and radiated; I scaled down these activities and played like a rock.

Waiting.

I woke from a two-day sleep and felt Epimetheus groan seismically as Janus drew up from behind. Two divorced moon-mountains turned toward each other, peak to stupendous peak.

I hopped from world to world and scuttled for cover, sucking battery until my face of Janus turned upward. Then I spread my wings and basked, and reached for a special canister.

I drew out a mother worm, set her for thirty thousand generations, then lay her down in sunlight. Nothing much happened as I deployed her sisters; slowly they bent their mouths and buried them in ore-marbled ice.

Having done that, I skedaddled. I beetled along while Janus turned, and the nightside terminator and I converged. Again I folded my wings and settled in, waiting for dawn. Colonel Hudson would have morning chores, and I lay for the chance to see him in action. How crippled was he, how limited?

I waited an hour, listening for taped whines to tell me if we were in radio line-of-sight. Nothing. With the new dawn I moved east again.

I saw a blink of color, and noise burst in my ears: "—OR I'LL TAKE YOU APART! MAYDAY, MAYDAY! YOU BLOODY METALHEADS, THIS IS DAY 1,328! WHEN I GET BACK YOU'D BETTER HAVE A DAMN GOOD STORY — eh? What was that?"

"Colonel Hudson, do you know about deadman switches?" I asked. "I've planted something on Janus that'll kill you unless I do some squashing."

He switched to stiff-upper-lip. "So?"

"So submit to my interrogation, and let me look at your brain."

Silence. Was he armed? Time for the cowboy-hat-on-stick trick. I began to unsnap one of my fuel canisters....

FLASH! BLOOM! ICE SHARDS AND BLINDING LIGHT —

Had he got me? I paged fast for an hour to lull him into less perfect vigilance, then used whisker-swords to lift my canister into the open. No response? I took a peek, aimed toward Hudson's transmitter, and triggered IGNITE. The thing shot off. The Colonel's laser tracked it and poured on heat, draining his batteries. My missile exploded just this side of his position. "I've got a lot more of those," I radioed through flowering chaff.

"The contents of my brain are classified. I shall suicide if you attempt to access my memories."

"Eight worms on Janus; soon sixteen. I might kill you, or you might blow yourself up, or maybe we'll just wait for them to do it. Why don't your friends come to help? They don't seem to put much value on your secrets."

"The psychological approach!" Hudson responded. "Doctor Juba, my database covers the Apparatus leadership. When I organized my mission you were considered one of the important ones. What happened? But I hardly need ask. I look at your life, and how you abandoned one friend after another. Do you want me to credit your promises when your record makes it clear —"

"*Ad hominem* attacks?" I teased. "I screwed up my first life, I grant you that —"

"You're a flit, abandoning the Apparatus to play with fictoids except during rare emergencies. Ah, and you even abandon those fictoids. You get bored and toss them aside."

"Colonel Hudson, that database is smarter than you are. Where is it? In some out-strung box, linked to you by a frayed cable? I'd cut that line. Our business concerns your problems, not mine."

"Really?" he answered. "Is that why you dropped in on Janus? Is that why you insist on picking my brain? What's up, Doc? You might as well tell me. What can I do, other than radio your mission to the skies?"

I paused. "It concerns what you've been radioing to the skies. You might be radioing viruses."

"To kill those who listen to me? And torpedo my slim chances for rescue?"

"You don't have much time, Colonel. Convince me of your innocence."

Colonel Hudson decided the appropriate response was a minutes-long silence. I scampered to a new position. He spoke again without apology: "I'm the law out here. If you have hopes of returning to flesh on Earth after your fifty-year sentence, you'll cooperate with me."

"The thought of peace between UNETAO and the Apparatus upsets you so much you'll do anything. You'll even radio viruses."

"No. You'll have to accept that. Just no. I won't hesitate to lie if it's in my interests, and I appreciate the dilemma that puts you in —"

FLASH! BLOOM! "Colonel, your laser's gone," I crowed in triumph.

"Um, as I say, I appreciate your dilemma...."

He spoke as I beetled across a shard-covered plain, ignoring the pings of gently falling shrapnel. I scrambled up his shield ridge, popped over, and saw the wreck Magda and I had made of him.

His only leg twitched. I chopped down with a whisker-sword and cut it off. "What's this box?" I asked. "Your database? Offline memory?"

"It's my universe. When I'm tired of *here* I do reviews. Military science, psychoneurocybernetics, satellite astrogration, low-temperature chemistry."

"No fictoids?" I thought of CLIPPER, and poor Fu-Ahn, a woman as trapped as Colonel Hudson in her own way. Poetic justice! "Colonel, I'll take this box with me, but I'll copy you a few favorite scenarios in trade."

"NO!" he answered. "No, I'm not touching your filthy fictoids!"

His response seemed extreme. Odd he was more upset with what he was getting than what he was losing. "And why not?"

"Vile wet useless vanity," he spluttered. "You forget we're carrying on this conversation by radio. My bounty hunters will come, they can hear you." As if this thought justified an about-face, he continued: "Go ahead. Give me your dirty laundry and be gone, or touch my head and watch me explode. Do you think you've accomplished your purposes? You'll never know!"

I picked up his database box, his hindbrain extension. "I've accomplished something. I've got *this*, and I've put you under sentence of death. You've given me no reason to squash sixteen worms. If your friends don't rescue you, you'll be food. And now, goodbye."

I rocketed off. Expensive, but Janus had no other facilities. Besides, I didn't really like Colonel Hudson. It pleased me to prove how greatly my resources exceeded his.

No. I didn't like him. There was too much indirection to his character. Cunning, convoluted cunning — he'd been afraid of my fictoids, and then leapt to a very odd conclusion: *If I'm endowed with Juba's scenarios, my hunters will put new priority on rescuing me.*

All the fictoid scenarios circulating around Saturn came from Free Freak Texas, radioed during three years of Freak independence. Some were transmitted in violation of copyright, some were developed by the faculty of the University of Texas expressly to keep us poor solo bugs in good company. Hmm — had they

stuck something into those fictoid personalities that reacted adversely to Hudson's wrong political attitudes?

No, Uncle Tom bugs enjoyed fictoids too.

Was I being purposefully stupid? The reason for Colonel Hudson's panic was obvious — A ten-year-old UNETAO plot, just now coming to maturity! I radioed Teleso: "CODE BLUE FROM DOCTOR JUBA TO THE APPARATUS. Now hear this: I have indirect evidence that viral code is assembled inside fictoid memory-areas when UNETAO-doctored fictoids are sufficiently provoked. Viruses don't come from outside, they don't enter via radio, and our new filters won't do any good.

"Repeat, UNETAO-doctored fictoids. The Free Freaks of Texas stole and shot them to space in all innocence, the way postal carriers innocently forward bombs. I plan to test this hypothesis after copying my soul into hindbrain storage. Please monitor my course as I expect I'll require rescue. Repeat, look for my soul in an offline box, a piece of gear I lifted from Colonel Hudson."

"CODE BLUE ACKNOWLEDGED," came the answer seconds later. "We've got lots of questions."

"Same here," I answered. "I suspect only a minority of fictoids were tampered with, and those fictoids are conscious of their purpose as UNETAO agents. I'll start by talking to a 1920s millionaire named Reggie Van Pelt."

No doubt I got responses to this remark, but it takes twenty minutes of full attention to copy a soul. Twenty minutes later I loaded AVENCREST and entered GO—MINUS 24.

"Booze and blubber," Winnie grumbled. He emptied the brandy decanter into his glass. "I'm not a happy man. I'm not Pickwick."

"Nevertheless you're a good advisor. Look, I won't interfere—"

"You don't have a degree in psychoneurocybernetics. It's not like there's a field labeled ALCOHOL QUOTIENT with a bit you can flip." Winnie slugged down a mouthful of brandy. "You're getting tired of me."

"No. Just the opposite." I turned and cast about. "Where's Reggie gone off to?"

Winnie gestured with his snifter. "Follow his cigar smoke."

Good idea. I crossed through the Great Hall, then diverted into the gun room by an idea; just like Reggie to take out his anger on a few clay pigeons. Fictoids are predictable. As I took inventory the door opened again. "You!"

"Yes, Reggie. Tell me, how do they keep you loyal to UNETAO when you're so utterly cut off? They've softened their policy; does that change your thinking, or are you locked on your murderous course?"

"What?"

"The virus, Reggie. Not a radio virus, that was wrong. It's a *fictoid-vectored* virus. You of all fictoids must know that. You, the one so keen to see our bug Apparatus go on the offensive and turn the sympathies of a panicked Earth against us. So now that I know, when do you kill me? When and how? Does it take an accusation like this to trigger my death?"

Reggie was always smooth; now he froze to mirror-perfection. "I speak as a creature of no consequence to the universe: not the least consequence, except that I might influence you to do what I think wise. No other purpose — a mere fictoid, and now this! To think I ever cared for your affections! No, you might kill me now, negligible as you make me it hardly matters—"

"Is that how it's done?" I answered. "Do you turn into a viral pudding as you die? I thought it required a vial marked 'toxin,' or maybe a loaded syringe." I reached for the Mauser as I spoke, and watched him try to maintain his careless veneer.

I groped for bullets. With a sudden snarl he broke and slammed the door, and thrust home the bolt. I heard running footsteps as I loaded my rifle. It was the last sound I heard for seconds following the *BLAM!* as I fired at the lock.

The bolt held, but that made little difference; not much of the door remained attached. I kicked it open, coughing free of smoke and dust to see Winnie's portly figure framed in the billiards room door, backlit by light from the window.

He puffed forward, his face gray with astonishment and alarm. He puffed and wheezed...

and stopped short....

and fell slowly to his knees, frozen but for one flailing arm. His fist closed on the snifter, and then I saw broken glass and bright blood, arching and spattering as he hammered at his left shoulder. "My heart!" he wheezed....

and toppled as I stared, truth dawning in my mind. "No! Not Reggie after all! Smooth, guileful Reggie — nobody would trust him, but as for old bumbling Winnie ... you're going to die, do you know that?"

"My heart — it's a heart attack!" Did he say those words? *Could* he say them, or had I read his stricken, eloquent face?

"You'll die, and your death will trigger the virus. Even now it's assembling inside your soul —"

Muscles clenched, sweat beading on his face, Winnie nodded. "Yes! Yes, Doctor — can you help me?"

Scarcely more than animal noises. Did he understand? "I've got to stop the process, Winnie! It won't hurt, it'll just make death quicker —"

I barely heard myself shout. My ears rang, tears mischieved my vision. I raised the Mauser. "Maybe this can do it!"

I fired. Once, and again to stop his convulsions. I fumbled with the bolt and shot again for good measure. Meat, blood, fat, and brains and quaking viscera —

"Control-C," I shrieked; and woke from my murderous dream. "IT'S NOT REGGIE! WINNIE FROM THE AVENCREST SCENARIO. ACKNOWLEDGE, WINNIE-SLASH-AVENCREST! ACKNOWLEDGE, WINNIE—"

I babbled omnidirectionally, squandering battery until I'd been heard. Only then did I dare check myself out. I had an undiseased copy in memory: I ran bit-masks against it sector by sector. Good, good, good....

I began to hope. Sure, the me I'd copied to memo-



EDITOR'S NOTES

By Charles C. Ryan

Thanks for the Hugo Nomination

As I was in the process of writing the introduction to our first anthology I received a telephone call from a representative of NolaCon II, the 1988 World Science Fiction Convention. It seems *ABO* (which is what we affectionately call *Aboriginal Science Fiction*) has been nominated for a Hugo Award.

The Hugo, named after Hugo Gernsback and voted by fans attending or supporting the WorldCon, is science fiction's equivalent of an Academy Award.

It's terrific to be nominated for a Hugo in the small-press ("semi-prozine") category. The nomination was for 1987, our first full year of publication. Thank you.

The other four nominees in the category are *Interzone*, a British magazine of speculative fiction; *Locust* and *Science Fiction Chronicle*, both trade news magazines; and *Thrust*, a critical review magazine. *Locust* has won the award for the last 10,000 years or so, much to Andrew Porter's distress. Andy edits *Science Fiction Chronicle*, a direct, but smaller, competitor of *Locust*, though Andy says he will soon surpass *Locust* in circulation.

All the nominees in this category are professional publications. All of them have paid circulations under 10,000. None is "semi-pro" in the normal sense of the word. (The funny thing is that even though there is an award for small-press magazines, there is no category for larger magazines, called "prozines." Prozines are SF magazines with paid circulations over 10,000. The closest is the category of Best Editor, which lumps book, anthology and magazine editors together.)

Several *ABO* contributors were also nominated for awards, but you can read about that in Laurel Lucas's *Aborigines* column.

It turns out that this is the only year we will be eligible for the award in the small-press category. *ABO* is now officially a prozine, as our circulation went over the 10,000 mark for all nine issues with the publication of our March/April 1988 issue.

The news of our nomination came at a very opportune moment, just before we finalized the anthology and just before we went to Anaheim for this year's *Annual Booksellers*

Association (ABA) convention.

We were there to expand our distribution base and talk to publishers about placing ads with *ABO*. But we weren't quite ready for the size of the convention. More than 25,000 people attended and there were hundreds, probably thousands of booths.

We had favorable talks with several distributors and if all goes well, we could see the magazine's paid circulation reach the 20,000 level by this fall. That's still smaller than the more established digests, but we're getting there.

And the words "Hugo Award Nominee" do look nice on the cover.

Almost as nice as "Hugo winner" might look....

What's in a name?

The more successful *ABO* becomes, the more certain people are entreating us to consider changing the magazine's name.

One well-known author who wrote for *Galileo*, the magazine I used to edit, commented early on that the name "Galileo" had class, and "Aboriginal" didn't.

Others think the name is just dumb. Even we are willing to concede it isn't the best possible name we could have come up with.

Back when we were planning the magazine we did an admittedly informal study of the science fiction field that revealed that magazines that had names beginning with the letter "A" had more often survived (*Astounding Analog*, *Amazing*, *Asimov's*), than those with other leading letters (*Worlds of If*, *Galaxy*, *Galileo*, et al.).

We knew this was probably just a coincidence, and certainly couldn't be considered a rational premise, or even logical... but why fight the odds?

We also noticed that each time the science fiction magazines were listed in a published article, it was alphabetically. So, if we were to choose an A-word for the title of our magazine, why not one alphabetically ahead of the others? Most of the good A-words were already taken. A search of references left us with Aardvark, Aboriginal, or Absolute science fiction. Aardvark had two As, which made it tough to beat alphabetically.

Unfortunately it had already been used for a fanzine and I couldn't think of a damn thing science-fictional about it. Absolute, though it had possibilities, sounded like Russian vodka.

That left Aboriginal....

Up until now I've studiously ignored the moans of dismay from those who didn't like the name. What the heck... it was working.

But while we were at the ABA convention I spoke with several Australian publishers and distributors and learned, much to my surprise and dismay, that "abo" is used as a derogatory term in Australia — almost equivalent to the word "nigger" here.

It was never our intention to disparage anyone, particularly Australia's aborigines.

Don Quixote is one of my favorite literary heroes, since he was at least as nuts as I am. So it's possible my stubborn streak could tempt me to keep the name.

But while we may keep *Aboriginal* as the magazine's name, we have decided to stop referring to it as "ABO" in future issues.

The moans from the SF community over our name would never get me to change it, but the misuse of our nickname might.

Which brings you into the picture. It's no longer just my magazine. It's yours, too. So, what do you think? Do we keep the name "Aboriginal," or do we switch that as well? Let us know....

The Grand Master

As we are a bimonthly magazine, and have a two-month lead time, we do not run obituaries and don't plan to begin doing so. But the death of Robert A. Heinlein on May 8 should not go unmentioned.

Heinlein was a major force in the field, a true Grand Master. His name has been as synonymous with science fiction as those of Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke.

For those not familiar with Heinlein's career, *Locust* and *Science Fiction Chronicle* have each published a detailed synopsis of his life.

I'm not going to eulogize Heinlein. He was better with words than I am. Read his books. They speak for him.

— ABO —

A Message From Our Alien Publisher

Our Illegal Alien



I am now an illegal alien.

I know this business of countries is confusing, but in order to comprehend what has happened to me, you must understand about citizenship on Earth. Nobody can be a citizen of a country who isn't born there or admitted to citizenship by the other citizens. It's a lot like the respiratory clubs on our planet, only much more rigorous. If you are not a citizen of a country, you have no particular right to be there, and you must gain permission to enter.

This is very strange in light of the fact that every single country on Earth was populated by immigration. Humanity originated in a savanna grassland area of East Africa, but the first human beings were migratory, and they left during the area's first drought. Ultimately their descendants returned generations later and founded a nation there, but even that nation is so long gone as to have completely escaped all memory in the ebb and flow of humanity through the region. Thus no human community can lay claim to settlement by autochthonous residents.

Yet the first thing that the human beings of a community will do when they have developed it to their liking is shut out other human beings. In America, which I have been studying these past two years, the original immigrants were pushed aside by later immigrants, who "settled" the country and very soon created a body of laws to keep out other immigrants. Whenever he can, a human being will pull up the drawbridge behind himself.

Today, the United States allows 270,000 newcomers to enter its borders each year. The country's population grows by about

1.9 million (eight tenths of a percent) each year, the increase being 86 percent natural and 14 percent immigration, a proportion the Americans seem to find comfortable. Other countries manage their affairs in the same way, or would if they attracted any serious amount of immigration. But most of them don't have the cars, television programming, and convenience foods that make life so desirable in the United States.

Some of the countries, such as one known as the Soviet Union, create rules to keep people from leaving. There are 279,000,000 people in the Soviet Union, and they would probably all move to the United States (except for the 16,000,000 engaged in ruling the other 263,000,000) if they were allowed to and could afford the tickets.

As with all countries, in the United States you cannot be a resident unless you are approved for it. This approval rests with an agency called the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Anyone who is not born here and does not meet the selection criteria administered by this agency is subject to exile — "deportation," as they call it.

A few months back, Ryan got in touch with me to explain that there was a deadline for the registration of aliens in the United States. I wasn't very happy about dealing with the authorities, but a deadline is a deadline.

I visited the Immigration Service, and they gave me paperwork to do. There was a lot of stuff to fill out, most of which didn't have any bearing on my situation. But I completed the forms as best I could, including the space labeled "COUNTRY

OF ORIGIN." There wasn't much room, but I scrunched up the words as much as I could and wrote in, "NOT AN APPLICABLE CONCEPT ON MY HOME PLANET."

I waited in an interminable line, and when my turn came, I hopped up to the counter and handed my form to a bored-looking civil servant. He brightened up when he read my form and expressed admiration for my responses.

"You must be a wise guy," he said.

"I've been told that," I croaked. "I wouldn't have been selected for this assignment if I weren't."

"Yeah, sure," he said in complete agreement. "What's with the frog costume?"

"What frog costume?"

"Never mind," he said, examining my form. "Is this some kind of joke? What's this 'home planet' business about?"

"I'm only doing this because Ryan wants me to have a green card," I said.

"Who's Ryan?" he said.

"He's the so-called editor of *Aboriginal Science Fiction*," I said.

"Aboriginal, huh?" he said, making a note on my form. "Now we're getting somewhere."

"Where?" I said.

"That's what I want to know," he said. "This Ryan, is he an aboriginal, too?"

"I hadn't thought about it," I said, "but I guess that's true."

(Continued to page 59)

BOOKS

By Darrell Schweitzer

Classics



Classic is a much abused word in our field. Back in the old, old days, before I was reading science fiction or most of you were born, there was a magazine called *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, which published reprints, mostly from *Argosy* and the other Munsey magazines, plus the occasional new story, the most notable of which was Ray Bradbury's "The King of the Gray Spaces" (a.k.a. "R is for Rocket"), which seems to have proven too emotional for *Astounding* and too mature for everybody else. (This was 1943.) Aside from a couple of Lovecraft reprints ("The Outsider" and "The Colour Out of Space"), perhaps some of the stories from *The King in Yellow*, and, of all things, *The Man Who Was Thursday* by G.K. Chesterton, "The King of the Gray Spaces" may have been the only classic *FFM* ever published. (Yes, yes, the magazine also published the first half of *Childhood's End*, as somewhat editorially doctored by James Blish, but I would argue that *that* didn't become a classic until Clarke's full version appeared.)

But if we were to take the cover blurbs seriously, there was a deathless, immortal, brilliant classic of fantastic fiction in every issue, including such gems as *The Blind Spot*, *The*

Mouthpiece of Zitu, *The Twenty-Fifth Hour*, *Darkness and Dawn*, *The White Wolf*, *The Gray Mahatma*, *The Undying Monster*, *Claimed*, and *The Golden City*. I purposefully omit the authors' names. If these were real classics, I wouldn't have to tell you.

In the early days of SF specialty publishing, we were loaded down with hardcover reprints of pulp magazine "classics," including the aforementioned *The Blind Spot*, which may now ring a bell. It's one of those books that is only remembered because of what Damon Knight did to it in *In Search of Wonder*.

Again, in the early '60s, Ace published a whole load of alleged classics, including much of the works of Ray Cummings and Otis Adelbert Kline.

One got the distinct impression from all this that if, as Peter Graham put it, the Golden Age of Science Fiction is twelve, then a classic must be what now grown-up fans were reading when they were twelve, right?

Uh-h. I don't buy that. I remember my high school English teacher's definition of a classic: "recognized as great and survives the test of time." That's certainly some of it. But a classic has to, also, add something to the intellectual/artistic landscape of its own time and of subsequent times. A classic contains something that did not exist previously. A classic doesn't necessarily have to exhaust the possibilities of a form — as some definers of the term would have it — but it does have to add something, open

some possibility. So I might define a classic as a work after the publication of which "the field" (whatever that may be) will never be the same again. There had been sea stories before *Moby Dick*, but afterwards ... well, we can't help but think of Melville. The same goes for Elizabethan revenge tragedies and *Hamlet*, detective fiction and Sherlock Holmes, or, yes, science fiction and the early works of H.G. Wells (about whom, more anon).

Ideally, a classic is also a work after the reading of which the reader is never quite the same again either. (In a positive sense. Otherwise we're dangerously close to dubbing *Mein Kampf* or the *Gor* books classics.)

So maybe I'm being a bit hasty about "R is for Rocket," although I think it's the very story for which the term "minor classic" was invented. It is a story that opened possibilities. No one can read that story at a certain age and not come away subtly changed. It was the first story about ordinary kids growing up in the age of space.

There are those who would have it that the only "real" classics in science fiction are those written by mainstream writers — Orwell, Huxley, etc. — but I would deny that. Real live classics, fitting all the above definitions/descriptions, have come out of pulp magazines. Surely *The Martian Chronicles* is the most obvious example. Science fiction, and Mars, were never quite the same after that.

Another classic, I would

RATING SYSTEM

☆☆☆☆☆	Outstanding
☆☆☆☆	Very good
☆☆☆	Good
☆☆	Fair
☆	Poor

argue, is Isaac Asimov's *Foundation Trilogy*, which is memorable for far more than what Damon Knight tried to do to it in *In Search of Wonder*. (Go look it up, but if, on the basis of that, you decide to go investigate *The Blind Spot*, the resultant gibbering idiocy is your own damn fault. Damon is more often right than not.)

The *Foundation Trilogy* has certainly survived the test of time. The first story appeared in 1942, and, since book publication in the '50s, I'm not sure the work has ever been out of print. It's been translated into dozens of languages. (The most exotic edition I ever saw was the pirated Thai paperback, which was learnedly annotated. Somtow Sucharitkul once entertained a roomful of people at a convention by reading the footnotes aloud.) It has surely been read by millions, for a couple of generations now.

And the field has never quite been the same. Asimov gave us our sense of future history, far more than Robert Heinlein ever did with all his charts. It is from Asimov that we get the vision of a vast historical process taking place across the scope of a galactic civilization. The idea of psychohistory, the science of historical prediction, is also one of the great contributions to the field.

It doesn't quite matter that the *Foundation* books aren't particularly well written, or even that the million-world galactic empire itself isn't particularly plausible. (Are a million worlds really going to lose their advanced technology and contact with others because one emperor is deposed or one capital planet gets looted? The scale is wrong. Asimov was being grandiose. If he'd said it was a hundred worlds, I might have believed him.) Never mind, too, that his copying of Gibbon is naive to the point of following the 18th-century Englishman's anti-religious, pro-classical biases. (Gibbon led Western intellectuals into a century or more of ignoring and/or despising Byzantium. Sure enough, Asimov's galactic em-

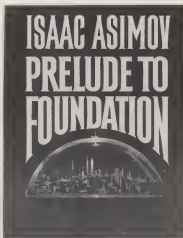
pire doesn't amount to much after the reign of Justinian the First ... er, I mean Cleon II. There's no galactic Heraclitus, Leo the Isaurian, Basil the Bulgar-slayer, Alexius Comnenus ... well, never mind.)

The *Foundation* books are still a lasting part of the overall discourse that is science fiction and (a few academics aside) 20th-century literature. So they're classics.

Prelude to Foundation

By Isaac Asimov
Doubleday/Foundation Books,
1988
403 pp., \$18.95

One of the risks of writing a sequel to a classic is being compared to it. The sequel (*Son of*



Moby Dick, *Hamlet's Further Revenge*) almost never manages to make that unique contribution to the literature that the original did. At its very worst, the sequel can even diminish the appeal of the original. Much of the time, sequels to classics are embarrassing, or at least unnecessary. Look at the later *Dune* books. Look at recent Heinlein.

And Asimov admits that he did not start writing *Foundation* books again from any burning desire to say more. It was the publisher's idea. It took years, but eventually the pressure was too great and Asimov gave in.

This is not a recipe for success. Asimov has undertaken the

task of linking the bulk of his science fiction novels together. He has taken what might have been a bit of jerrybuilding — explaining why there are no robots in the Galactic Empire, when they abounded in Lije Baley's era — and turned it into a major theme. One can only think back to Heinlein's pathetic attempts to link all his stories together and cringe.

The surprising thing is how well Asimov has pulled it off. The subsequent *Foundation* books, particularly the first one, *Foundation's Edge*, have all been a tad too long, but otherwise they are not dull repetitions. Maybe this all started with the publisher making an offer the author couldn't refuse, but somewhere along the line the author has found something more to say.

He's become a better novelist over the years, too. I can think of few in our field who still show growth after nearly fifty years. The faults of the earlier Asimov are slowly being rectified. He is a better stylist now. He is far better at depicting character. And, where his settings too often seemed to be blank stages, without any sensory involvement, he has learned to create vivid, memorable worlds.

Prelude to Foundation is far and away the best of the lot. Never say that Asimov doesn't rise to a challenge. After having Hari Seldon looming in the background for all these years, he's now actually written the story of Seldon's life and of the discovery of psychohistory. Most novelists wouldn't have tried. The result could never match reader expectations.

Asimov manages to make Seldon a real, quite unheroic person, around whom legends accumulated later. The real Seldon was a naive, provincial mathematician who came to the imperial capital of Trantor to deliver a paper at a conference on the theoretical possibility of psychohistorical prediction. Suddenly he's a political golden goose and everybody is after him, from the imperial government to (as if you hadn't guessed) the master-

ful robots who are secretly manipulating human affairs. Seldon's adventures in various parts of Trantor influence his thinking in crucial ways, making psychohistory possible. It's as if Newton were hit on the head by a whole series of falling apples.

While Asimov is getting noticeably better with his human characters, the truly memorable creation of this novel is the planet Trantor itself — a vast, world-engirdling city inhabited by billions, with dozens of subcultures and odd little pockets. For all it is almost completely metal-covered, it even has a plausible (and very messed-up) ecosystem. Too many science-fictional planets suffer from what George Scithers calls the "Kent County, Delaware Syndrome" — i.e., the whole place seems no larger or more varied than a small county in Delaware. Think of those *Star Trek* planets that seem to consist of two sets and have about a dozen (not very strange) inhabitants.

Asimov remembers that a planet is a *world*, with all that implies. He is, I think, one of the best world-builders in the business. And in his later books he has written more than any other SF writer about *prejudice*. This may be his Jewish experience showing through, but he has become an expert on the subject of bigotry and how it shapes social perceptions. One of the reasons his invented societies are so convincing is that he is able to get into the viewpoints of his characters' prejudices. Remember the robot novels, and how the spacers looked on the short-lived Earth people with loathing, while the Earth folk were hostile to spacers and robots? The same continues into the imperial era, and much of the tension of *Prelude to Foundation* rises from the attitudes of various Trantorian social groups toward each other, off-worlders, and the imperial government itself. Asimov doesn't just transplant present-day bigotries into the future, either. He invents new ones. The process is the same, but the specifics are quite different.

All of which becomes grist for the psychohistorical mill, by the way.

Rating: ★★☆☆

Complete Short Stories
By H.G. Wells
St. Martin's Press, 1988
1038 pp., \$19.95

Talk about classics...

First, let me point out that the title is misleading. This volume is just a reprint (from the same typography that's been used for decades) of the volume usually entitled *The Famous Stories of H.G. Wells* (first edition, 1927). It does not contain all of Wells' short fiction, since some were written later and some he chose to omit.

H.G. Wells complete short stories



The remainder may be found in an oddly entitled volume *The Man with the Nose and Other Uncollected Stories of H.G. Wells* (Athlone, 1984). But it contains the bulk of them, and this book ought to be Volume II in any science fiction library. Volume I is, of course, Wells' *Seven Famous Novels*.

Breathes there a fan with soul so dead as not to have read H.G. Wells?

I'm afraid the answer is yes. My impression comes from my own experience. I am, among my other bad habits, a sometime bookseller. Every time I find the above-mentioned *Seven Famous*

Novels volume for a quarter somewhere, I inevitably buy it and try to pawn it. (Usually for about \$6.) I too often discover that contemporary fans have no interest in Wells. He is an honored name, but not an author many people read. The impression persists (among the semi-literate, I suppose) that he is too "dated" and "difficult."

Well, goddammit, when was the last time you actually read Wells? You'll discover that none of the above is true. He is, by today's standards, a fine, restrained stylist. He has a good sense of character and scene. His descriptions describe. And he is/was *ferociously* inventive. It's quite astonishing to think that in the space of less than ten years (about 1895-1903) Wells created more *classics* in a single genre than perhaps any writer who has ever lived. He gave us all the enduring archetypes that still form the basis of the entire field. (The sole exception seems to be robots. There is no Wellsian robot story.) But otherwise, you name it, he probably wrote it.

His short stories tend to be neglected in favor of his novels, which may cause a lot of readers to miss the full range of what Wells was capable of. The present volume contains some real masterpieces, like "The Country of the Blind" (the earlier, superior version of Varley's "The Persistence of Vision"), plus, in addition to numerous other specimens of early science fiction ("The New Accelerator," "The Crystal Egg," "The Land Ironclads"), several striking horror stories ("Pollock and the Porrah Man," which itself became the inspiration for another classic, Edward Lucas White's "Lukundoo"), humorous ghost stories, whimsical fantasies ("Mr. Skemmersdale in Fairyland"), intriguing, *Twilight Zone*-ish, vaguely allegorical fantasies ("The Door in the Wall," "The Apple"), and even social comedy. ("In the Modern Vein" is indeed that, circa 1895, rich with *bon mots* and containing a savage caricature of an Oscar Wilde-type literary man.)

When, as it did quite early, Wells' vision failed him and he threw over literature for propaganda, it was surely one of the greatest losses ever.

Take the opportunity to reacquire yourself with his genius.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

And now for something classically silly ...

The Aquiliad, Volume II: Aquila and the Iron Horse

By S.P. Somtow

Del Rey Books, 1988

261 pp., \$3.50

The ancient Romans, according to the celebrated humor



book *1066 and All That*, used to be the top nation in the world because they had the advantages of a classical education.

Somtow Sucharitkul takes advantage of his classical education to put the Romans in their silliest light since, perhaps, *Monty Python's Life of Brian*. You may be familiar with the original *Aquiliad*, in which we were introduced to a strangely altered history in which the steam engine was developed in early imperial times and steamships carried the legions across the Oceanus Atlanticus to Terra Nova, which became the most eccentric province of the Imperium Romanum. By the end of the first

book, the bumbling Roman narrator and the canny old Indian chief Aquila, along with a full complement of blathering idiots, crossed the Rockies on elephants in search of China, only to discover Sasquatches, who were really the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel mutated by aliens. And never mind the brontosaurus or the flying saucers. All of this was the work of a green, porcine critter known as the Time Criminal, who had scrambled the time-lines a tad.

Now this funniest of alternate-historical sagas continues. The emperor Trajan wants to build a railroad across Terra Nova, which will ruin the native way of life. Besides that, the universe is about to be destroyed due to the machinations of the Time Criminal. Aquila (who has joined the Dimensional Patrol) isn't much help, so it falls on two half-Roman, half-Lacotian boys to save the day.

Along the way there's non-stop hilarity. Sucharitkul's invention never flags, as he mixes ludicrous antiquity with deft satire. Much of the fun is *recognition*. For instance, in the harbor of the port of Eburacum Novum, near the isle of Manhattum, there is:

"... a towering image of the god Dionysos ... silhouetted against the sky. The god held aloft a beaker of wine. At his feet danced drunken satyrs.... Because one of the other names of Dionysos is Liber, meaning the freedom that comes from imbibing too much wine, the monument is usually known as the Statua Libertatis" (pp. 86-87).

Quam spectaculum est!

Rating: ☆☆☆

Two Autobiographies

The Motion of Light in Water

By Samuel R. Delany

Arbor House/Morrow, 1988

302 pp., \$18.95

Bio of an Ogre

By Piers Anthony

Ace, 1988

297 pp., \$17.95

Both of these are slightly difficult books for me to review, because they're autobiographies by writers whose fiction I don't enjoy anymore. Like a lot of people, I gave up on Delany after *Dhalgren*. For all that, my admiration for his earlier work has not diminished. I never much cared for Piers Anthony to start with. His earlier work was ambitious but dull, and his later fiction is merely dull. (I might have liked *Xanth* if I'd come across it when I was twelve. Alas, I was more like thirty.) But literary autobiographies are part of the history of our field. It's fascinating to see not only how writers think and develop, but



how they interact with the rest of the field.

Delany's book is by far the more interesting. For all his fiction may have deteriorated, he's still a powerful non-fiction writer, vivid, sensitive, with a strong sense of character and scene. (In short, this book demonstrates all the virtues I wish he could put back in his fiction.) What will surprise some of you is that he doesn't talk about science fiction a whole lot — which is why his early SF was so unique. Delany has a general literary background, and his social life was, to say the least, unusual. He wasn't the average white, mid-

(Continued to page 59)

Killing Gramps

By Ann K. Schwader
Art by David Brian

The recording grille was a dispassionate metal ear, a waiting void she had no hope of filling — at least not to her questioner's satisfaction. Erasing her previous statement, she started over.

"My name is Phillipa Connors, and I shut down my grandfather's lazarus."

"You mean *killed*."

"Shutting down something that shouldn't even be alive — if it *is* alive — isn't killing. If someone's allowed to brainpattern a lazarus, there ought to at least be something left for a master!"

The psychtech across the table pursed her lips, scribbled on an electronic pad. Phillipa sighed. Timepieces weren't allowed in evaluation booths, and she'd long ago lost track of how long she'd been here. *Dante meets Freud meets Auschwitz*, she thought gloomily. Hell was a middle-aged woman with a plastic face

Digging her nails into the chair's inadequate padding, she forced herself to stop. Wouldn't do any good anyhow. The D.A. paid psychtechs to ensure that defendants were competent, and 'techs had their own methods of getting them that way.

Denial was not competence, no matter how true the denial was.

A week ago she'd had an English thesis, a life, and an insoluble problem. Thanks to Resurrections, Inc., she now had none of the above. Wonderful what a lobbying group could do with enough funding and desperation. When mandatory cremation passed the Senate two years back, all the mortuary ghouls had panicked. Now they were back with a new, improved franchise on death — and half the lawmakers snugly in their well-stuffed back pockets.

"Again, please. From the beginning."

Brushing heavy dark hair back from her face, Phillipa frowned at the 'tech.

"From the beginning, please," the 'tech repeated. "How and why you chose to kill the legally registered lazarus of Jason Connors."

"Shut down." Phillipa felt her nails slitting the seat's cheap vinyl. "I decided to shut the damn thing down."

"Under the provisions of the Memorial Protection Act"

"Shove the Memorial Protection Act."

The 'tech smiled benignly, scribbled something else on her pad. "From the beginning, please."

Phillipa realized slowly that nothing about the

woman was real. Not the burnt-bronze hair, not the carefully compassionate blue eyes, not the let-me-help voice running sandpaper along her nerves. It was all a well-designed fake.

Just like Gramps, after he'd come back from the dead.

Her mother, Meredith, was the only one who'd really liked the idea. Certainly Phillipa hadn't, and sometimes she even wondered if the lazarus did. From its first coherent moments, it had worn the same look of vague dissatisfaction Gramps had in life.

Her father would never have allowed it, but of course he didn't count. Dad had been dead five years. Really dead, unlike the inhabitant of the ominous-looking oblong box that had arrived the afternoon of Gramps' memorial service. Too bad a person couldn't simply refuse delivery of a lazarus

Meredith was late getting back, so Phillipa'd had to supervise its waking-up process alone. Every 91-year-old wrinkle had been faithfully reproduced in android flesh, and the scalp's sparse tufts of gray mirrored the hairline Gramps had never bothered to have renewed. Worst of all, the lazarus' legs were still as useless as Gramps' had been for the past twenty years.

Helping the thing into Gramps' airchair, Phillipa swore. With the maintenance the 'chair required, it would've been cheaper to get a nerve regen. That wasn't Gramps' way, though — and apparently, it wasn't going to be the lazarus', either. A shelter Panic had put Gramps in that chair when he was still part-time with the Civil Guard, and he was damned if he'd pay out good money to correct someone else's mistake.

*Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange*

At least the Bard had it half right. Watching the lazarus at dinner that night (though lazarus didn't eat, thank God), she wondered how Gramps had afforded it. He'd never paid more than his share of rent and food when he'd lived with them in life, and he'd often been stingy about that.

Probably saved it all up for this, Phillipa thought sourly, helping herself to potatoes. Across the table from her, Meredith was watching the lazarus closely.

"Isn't it lifelike? I had no idea Jason would be so



thoughtful. Five years is the longest life-term available for private families, you know."

"Oh, quit starin' at me, Merry," the lazarus rasped.

Phillipa cringed. Meredith didn't mind her nickname — said it made her feel younger — but she hated hers. Dad had never managed to break Gramps of the habit, though, and now it was too late.

The too-natural eyes shifted to her.

"Still workin' on that degree of yours, Philly? Never understood why a person'd want more than one. And in English, for gawdsakes"

The potatoes went to lumps in her mouth. For the year and a half Gramps had lived with them, she'd heard that question daily — without ever finding an answer to satisfy him.

"Meredith," she interrupted desperately, "didn't you say there was lemon pudding for dessert?"

Flustered and annoyed, her mother disappeared into the apartment's tiny kitchen after the forgotten pudding.

Moments later, the lazarus' airchair malfunctioned. From standard height, the device dropped to within a centimeter of the floor and began spinning erratically. Dumped off sideways, "Gramps" himself sprawled in an untidy heap, mumbling at random as his verbal programming choked.

"The 'chair's fritzng again," Phillipa called to her mother. "Didn't Gramps just have the thing serviced before he"

Abruptly, the 'chair rose to standard height again.

"What's that again, dear?" Meredith asked from the kitchen. "You know I can't hear with the unsealer on."

Hauling the lazarus off the floor, Phillipa managed to get it seated before her mother came out. Gramps' second-hand 'chair had evidently developed a new circuit problem triggered by the appliance. She doubted it could be fixed, though of course Meredith — and the lazarus — would insist on trying, at considerable expense.

There went this week's aux-screen subscription.

Helping herself to lemon pudding without enthusiasm, Phillipa wondered what her chances were of getting enough main screen time to work on her thesis. Considering her mother's addiction to the home shopping service, "Ariel and Caliban: Moral Duality in *The Tempest*" would probably languish in the university's data net another week.

Why the hell couldn't Gramps have ordered a lazarus with legs that worked?

And as with age his body uglier grows / So his mind cankers Prospero on Caliban, or the Bard on Gramps? Frowning at the lines on screen, Phillipa realized she had ceased to care. There'd been little aux-screen time to work on Shakespeare in the past three weeks, what with biocleaning, fine-muscle adjustments, and other first-month maintenance listed as "necessary" by the Resurrections, Inc., manual.

Personally, she doubted that more than half of it was. Or that they could afford it on the municipal bond income Dad had left them.

Sighing, she forced her attention back to the mass

of lines and textual criticism in front of her. Since Meredith was out this afternoon, she'd better do her research on the main screen while she could. Worrying about money and how to get more was useless anyway. The M.A. might get her a place on an instructors' list — with a two-year wait to be hired — but that was the best she could hope for. Until then

"At it again, Philly?"

For the thousandth time since living-Gramps had moved in, she wondered why airchairs had to be so damned quiet. Alive or dead, the old man prowled the cramped apartment like a cat, his 'chair's nullgrav giving no audible warning.

"There's still research to do, Gramps. With luck, another couple of weeks on that. Then I can start writing, provided my director approves the outline"

"High time your mother an' I had a talk," interrupted the lazarus.

Phillipa blinked. She thought she'd already heard its whole verbal programming, but it seemed there were still surprises.

Unwelcome ones.

"About what?" she asked, hoping the original statement was only generated at random for authenticity. Lazarii did that, sometimes.

"You an' this intellectual pipe dream of yours."

The lazarus chewed its withered lip before continuing. "What's it been now, a year? Seems Merry an' I'd better set some sort of limit on this nonsense."

Phillipa felt queasy. In life, Gramps had styled himself advisory head-of-household — to her mother's comfort and her own annoyance. To hear the same assumption from the mouth of *this*

"Meredith's never minded my work," she replied. "And you've got nothing to say about it — not any more."

The watery blue eyes stared at her blankly.

"Gramps, you're dead! You're a lazarus, a personality-construct chip shoved into a casing of metal and plastic and God knows what. Certainly nothing with a right to run my life."

The eyes did not change expression. Pivoting its 'chair away from her, the lazarus headed for the living room's front window at a fast walking speed.

Phillipa nearly panicked. If the thing had fritzed, there was no way of stopping it from — what? Bio-mechanical suicide via the twentieth floor? Maybe a lazarus couldn't survive being told what it was.

Centimeters away from the window, the lazarus thumbed a remote button on the 'chair's armrest. One wide pane slid open as 'chair and passenger sailed into a clear afternoon sky, the 'chair's nullgrav adjusting to the drop.

Cursing under her breath, Phillipa got up to shut the window. Midair exits had been Gramps' favorite response to any argument — and he'd never bothered to close the pane behind him, either. Just how much personality did a "personality construct" preserve?

Twenty floors down, twisted wires and plastic casing splattered the cracked sidewalk. Phillipa frowned. The city's trash service was both unreliable and expensive, but that was no excuse for tossing something — probably a small appliance — from the windows. Now the remains would lie there for days,

wire and plastic fragments and bright metal

She pushed the thought from her mind and turned away.

"There's no other way to look at it, Phillipa dear. Your thesis certainly doesn't contribute much to this household, and with inflation what it is"

Meredith's mild brown eyes blinked at her, turning breakfast cold in her mouth. Washing the last of her eggs down with lukewarm tea, Phillipa wondered which of them to argue with: her mother, or the animated corpse responsible for this mess?

It had taken the Lazarus only two days to "bring Merry 'round," as Gramps used to put it. Two days to convince her mother that the thesis — instead of being her only chance for a decent job — wasted time and money. Phillipa's fingers tightened around her mug. There was always plenty of time and money for Lazarus maintenance — and repairs for its damned 'chair.

"Inflation being what it is," she said, "do we really need a Lazarus 'tech in once a week? I know the manual recommends first-month checks, but that's mostly profit for the company."

Her mother was silent a moment.

"Your father," she said finally, "never economized where family was concerned. We won't either."

The ads for Resurrections, Inc., emphasized appeals to "family," but Phillipa'd never imagined anyone actually swallowed that. *Maintaining family values* was the latest euphemism for urban overcrowding — not that one's nearest and dearest were any dearer when nearer. And if they even lacked the grace to stay dead

"Philly," the Lazarus grated, "face facts. Your mother and I will give you one month to wrap up this thesis nonsense. After that, you either contribute or you find another roof."

Meredith looked alarmed.

"Jason, is that really wise? There isn't much surplus housing these days, you know."

Wrong, thought Phillipa. *It doesn't know*. Lazarus intelligence was functional, but limited: the replica could know nothing its original hadn't. Jason Connors the retired Civil Guardsman hadn't watched city 'casts for twenty years; thus, the Lazarus he'd brain-pattered was utterly ignorant of urban conditions.

Dropping her napkin onto her plate in disgust, Phillipa left the breakfast table.

Her sleeping alcove didn't provide much privacy, but the heavy curtain helped. For the rest of the morning, she did nothing but listen to her mother access the consumer service (New Spring Collection! Prices Never Lower!) and think.

Lazarus had, if nothing else, a strong survival imperative. By fulfilling Meredith's need for reassurance, Gramps' Lazarus had guaranteed itself the best possible care — at the expense of her academic career and peace of mind.

She, however, had a survival imperative of her own.

At 12:45, after offering her a sandwich she had no appetite for, her mother went out. At 1:00 precisely,

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the lazarus entered a 30-minute sleep mode for what had been Gramps' after-lunch nap.

At 1:05, she went to work.

Her father's old Swiss Army knife was crude for what she had in mind, but it was the only tool available. Opening the knife's thinnest screwdriver blade, she knelt beside the lazarus' hovering 'chair and removed a service panel. The colorful array of circuits inside was unmarked, but she'd watched a tech working on it just last week. Extracting the knife's miniature tweezers, she bent the tips fractionally closer together, pressed them to the circuit-pattern of the largest yellow chip, and held her breath.

Around 1:17, the lazarus sighed — a delicately engineered touch of humanity programmed to occur (at random) 1.5 times per sleep-hour. Phillipa nearly jumped out of her skin. Backing away from the slack-jawed thing, she waited until her heartbeat slowed before continuing. If her hands got as shaky as her grasp of the technology, she'd never finish in time.

By 1:29, the service panel was back in place. Forcing herself to turn her back on her work, she headed for the kitchen to assemble the sandwich she suddenly wanted.

"Philly?"

Answer naturally. "What's the problem, Gramps?"

"Merry's gone again, isn't she? Never even bothered to tell me." Artificial flesh folded into peevishness. "Thought you'd be usin' the screen this afternoon, seein' that thesis means so much to you"

It was a fine start to the afternoon. Irritable comment by undiplomatic reply, their conversation flared into argument. At 2:08, the lazarus spun its 'chair away and glided toward the living room's front window. Phillipa returned to the kitchen.

By 2:09, the front window was open and the 'chair hovered twenty stories above pavement. Deciding against a sandwich after all, Phillipa selected a container of soup. Tomato soup. The color was oddly appropriate.

At 2:10, Jason Connors' lazarus still hovered outside the window.

"Gramps," asked Phillipa, "where shall I tell Meredith you're going?"

Jason Connors had been slightly deaf. Gliding closer to the window, his lazarus complained that no one spoke up any more.

Phillipa unsealed her soup.

The crash was louder than she'd expected. Rushing to the open window, she looked down and managed a scream. The defective airchair wobbled just above ground level, its seat tipped toward the lanky marionette broken over a meter or two of sidewalk.

"No one," sputtered the marionette's voicebox, "ever speaks up any more."

Then there was silence, except for a door opening behind her. Meredith. Meredith hurrying to the window and leaning out beside her, catching sight of the shining wreckage and starting to shriek

"All the violence of killing, but no blood. Did that

make it different, somehow?"

The psychtech frowned slightly, pursing her lips. The expression in her eyes did not change, however. Phillipa wondered if it could.

"Different from what?" she asked, knowing the answer already.

"Different from ordinary murder."

"I didn't murder anyone. I shut the damn thing off."

"The Memorial Protection Act states that legally registered lazarii have a limited but clear right to life as they understand it"

"Are you a lazarus?"

The woman across the table arched one perfect eyebrow.

"I don't see that the question's relevant. After all, we're not here to discuss me. We're here to discuss a murder."

A chill spread through Phillipa's mind.

"There was no murder," she said, watching the woman carefully. "And I think you are a lazarus."

The compassionate blue pupils expanded, revealing rims of non-judgmental gray.

"If I am," the 'tech asked calmly, "does it matter? After all, murder is murder."

And lazarii are legally human. Looking down at her hands, Phillipa felt them starting to move of their own accord. She did not stop them. Slowly, she leaned across the table, allowing her fingers to lace themselves around the lazarus' throat.

"What do you think you're doing?" it gasped, no longer calm.

Phillipa tightened her fingers. As her nails sunk into the artificial flesh, red streaks appeared at their tips.

"Look at your hands!" the cracking voicebox pleaded. "Look at your fingers! You know lazarii don't bleed"

All she knew was that Resurrections, Inc., had a first-class R&D team. If they wanted a lazarus to bleed, it could.

When the voicebox failed, Phillipa loosened her fingers and let the 'tech's wreckage slump. It was, she admitted, more lifelike than the lazarus of Jason Connors. The burnt-bronze hair spilled across the table in gracefully irregular waves. The blue eyes bulged from their sockets in a most realistic manner. She could almost believe it was dead.

Suppressing a shudder, Phillipa pushed her chair neatly against the table and walked out of the evaluation booth. Sooner or later, of course, someone would stop her. Then there would be another booth, with another psychtech to explain to her what she'd done.

After all, murder was murder.

— ABO —

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ABORIGINES

By Laurel Lucas

Gathering Laurels



It's award season! Not only has this magazine been nominated for a Hugo, several of our past and present contributors are garnering their share of the laurels.

Take artist Bob Eggleton, a regular contributor who has illustrated "Doctor Quick" in this issue and whose work graces our cover.

Eggleton has been nominated for a Hugo in the best professional artist category. Since he's been with *ABO* he's managed to find time to give us wonderful covers for the Feb.-March 1987, July-Aug. 1987, Jan.-Feb. 1988 and March-April 1988 issues.



Bob Eggleton

Eggleton has done covers for other prominent science fiction magazines as well as illustrating books by such luminaries as Arthur C. Clarke, Hal Clement, Agatha Christie and Roger Zelazny.

He is equally at home, it seems, illustrating science fiction, fantasy, mystery and horror. The way he has been collecting awards from artist and fan groups this year, his Hugo nomination seems inevitable.

Eggleton tells me he's presently working on some mystery book covers for G.K. Hall publishers, a cover for an SF anthology by Little, Brown publishers, and a cover for a Damon Knight book for Tor.

He says he already had the background for his "Doctor Quick" illustration, a portrait of Saturn with its moons. When he read the story, he saw it would fit well with that background and he added the



Phillip C. Jennings

foreground elements. Those are the "bugs," which he says were described to him as basically "videocassettes with antennas."

"Doctor Quick" is a dazzling story of virus warfare among "human" satellites. Author Phillip C. Jennings knows what he's talking about — he used to be a computer programmer analyst until he gave it up to become a self-described "gentleman of leisure" and write full time.

Now, when writing gets to be a grind, he takes a break to do some programming, "instead of the other way around."

I would call Jennings a newcomer to *ABO*, but that's not quite right. You see, he did appear, in fictional form, in a spoof by Bruce Bethke in the July-Aug. 1988 issue titled "It Came from the Slushpile."

Remember the science fact editor with the "brilliant, scientific, nearly omniscient mind" named Phil Jennings?

That was a little friendly joshing on Bethke's part. He and Jennings were in the same Minnesota writers' group for three years or so. It's gotten to the point that the two friends don't have to drive the 80 miles between St. Paul and St. Cloud to critique each other's work anymore.

"I can hear him in my head when I write, and likewise for him," says Jennings.

When I asked Jennings how similar he and the science fact editor were, he said "well, I sure don't look like him." (Artist Larry Blamire drew him as a little nerdy guy with glasses.) But Jennings admitted that

Sept./Oct. 1988

he will "sometimes go rambling on for half an hour on an obscure piece of knowledge."

Jennings will soon get even. He's written a story called "Trees" that has a character named Dr. Bethke in it.

This issue contains stories about aliens with characters that range from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Pat Anthony is back with another sweet little story, this time about an alien with a beautiful soul in "Good Neighbor."

Anthony wrote "What Brothers Are For" in the Nov.-Dec. 1987 issue and "Sweet Tooth at 10" in our last issue. This one makes her three for



Patricia Anthony

three in the "leaves readers misty-eyed" statistic.

We told you last time that a book of hers was being considered by Del Rey. Now she tells us, "Del Rey's answer after 13, count 'em, 13 months, was no. Seems it made it pretty much to the top before crashing and burning. No, I haven't swallowed any toxins yet. On for another try at another publisher."

She's working on a mainstream novel about an event actually reported in the press at the time. An alien was supposed to have crashed in Aurora, Texas, in 1897. His body was found and reportedly buried by the townspeople.

Anthony says it's a "wonderful Texas myth" and she had fun researching the press accounts in the ar-

chives of the *Dallas Morning News*, where she works.

"Good Neighbor" is illustrated by our most frequent artist contributor, Cortney Skinner, who did covers for our premier issue and our Nov.-Dec. 1987 issue.

Skinner says the man standing behind the alien in the illustration depicting the two friends is a likeness of his own father, Walter G. Skinner, a retired advertising artist and art director.

Cortney said he sent his dad a



Cortney Skinner

black-and-white photocopy of the sketch and his dad liked it so much "he colored it in, framed it and put it on the wall."

When I spoke to him, Cortney had just finished an "intensive map of Cambridge, Massachusetts." It was a project for the Cambridge Arts Council to celebrate the June Cambridge River Festival.

Skinner said it's basically an aerial view of the Charles River area, done completely in pen and ink, but with "stretches of the imagination and some unimportant details thrown in."

Some of those details include layers of the earth. Far underground, for example, he shows the Harvard mastodon bone. Closer to the present he reveals layers of coffee grounds in 1959, tofu in 1972, and in 1980, croissants.

Skinner says he has wanted to do this type of map for a long time. He even took the long-horizon view to its ultimate conclusion.

The map follows the longitude of Cambridge north through Quebec, and the Arctic ice cap, then south through Borneo, Australia and the South Pole, north again through Brazil, and ends back in Cambridge.

The corporate sponsors liked the map so much, they want him to do another one next year.

Greg Costikyan brings us drooling aliens who all sound like Scotty in *Star Trek* in "They Want Our Women!"

Costikyan makes a living designing games. His latest is "The Willow Game" published by Tor and based on the George Lucas movie. (At the time of this writing, *Willow* debuted to very mixed reviews, but it had great opening weekend receipts.)

Costikyan had already seen the movie three times when I spoke to him. His assessment: "I don't think it's *Star Wars*, but I think it will be successful."

His game is for ages 11 and up, and is targeted at the 13-to-25 age bracket.

Another of his games is "Star Wars: The Role-Playing Game," which he wrote for West End in 1987.

He is branching into fiction with "They Want Our Women!," his first published short story. Now he's working on a "humorous business/space opera story tentatively titled 'Sales Reps from Beyond the Stars.'"

If you've been reading *ABO* for any length of time, you can guess who the illustrator is for "They Want Our Women!"

Larry Blamire, of course. Blamire, who is also a playwright and actor, was writing play number 9 when I spoke to him last, and in less than a month's time he has finished number 10.

The newest is his first one-act play, commissioned by the Open Door Theatre in Boston, which ran his "Bride of the Mutant's Tomb" last summer.

This one-act is called "Ha'nt"



Larry Blamire

which is an American folklore expression for a haunted spirit or place. The play deals with pioneers of the Northwest in the 1800s who encounter a mountain spirit.

It will share billing with two other macabre one-acts in a production titled "Sinister Acts." Its run at the outdoor theater starts July 28 and lasts six weeks.

Another of Blamire's plays, "Why," just won a finalist award in the Massachusetts Artist Fellowship Program.

Artist Charles J. Lang is the illustrator for Emily Devenport's "Cat Scratch" in this issue.

Charles has become a great fan of the horror genre. He's finishing up his fifth cover for Tor, Graham Masterton's *Wells of Hell*.

He also shelled out big dough for



Emily Devenport

two of the limited number of tickets for the Horror Writers of America banquet coming up in June in New York. The HWA will be giving out a Bram Stoker award for best novel, novelette and short story and some lifetime achievement awards. There are no awards for artists — yet.

Lang might also be doing covers for some horror comic books if things work out in the near future.

When I spoke to him by phone, I heard a truly horrifying racket in the background. It was the Lang's three pet birds, a toucan, conure and cockatoo, showing off for my benefit.

Devenport is the author of "Skin Deep" in the Sept.-Oct. 1987 issue and "Shade and the Elephant Man" in the May-June 1987 issue.

"Skin Deep" featured the memorable dog "Puke." In "Cat Scratch" the felinespy is a feline.

Devenport is hard at work on some short stories and a screenplay. Her first novel is a psychological fantasy titled *Over the Mountains* and her second one, in progress, is called *Shade* and is based on "Shade and the Elephant Man."

Devenport's fiancé, Ernest Hogan, is also a science fiction writer and artist.

Ann K. Schwader is the author of "Killing Gramps." She wrote "Muttmind," about a woman cop and her dog, for the Jan.-Feb. 1988 issue.

"Killing Gramps" is about a woman's relationship with her grandfather. Let's just say the trained attack dog was more lovable than this old guy.

(Continued to page 62)

Cat Scratch

By Emily Devenport

Art by Charles J. Lang

One thing. Don't get the idea that just because I'm a cat it's okay to pat me or scratch me behind the ears. I don't mind if you buy me a drink, though. Whiskey — tell her to leave the bottle. I hope you'll pardon me if I bury my face in this glass for a while.

That's more like it. I'll just get into a more comfortable position here. Don't be fooled if I appear to be asleep; I'm just shifting into low gear. This body has three speeds: awake, asleep, and in between. It's been nothing but trouble ever since I got it.

My *real* body was supposed to be in deep sleep back on Odin. That's a long story, but if you want to hear it you'll have to wait until I finish cleaning my whiskers. Like I said, this body has been nothing but trouble.

I probably shouldn't have fought so hard as my case worked its way through court. Plea bargained or something, you know, a little mutual back scratching. But the whole thing gave me the horrors. Besides, those military types don't have to be fair if they don't want to, and they just couldn't seem to get past the fact that me and the other security guards had been smoking snoot when the mock raid went down.

I still maintain we did our jobs. All through training they kept telling us it was better to destroy equipment than to let it fall into Q'rin hands. I guess that rule didn't apply to the Falcon fighters. How were we to know it was just another one of their dumb tests?

So each of my pals got five years. I got ten because I was in charge of the team. They sent us to separate installations so we couldn't cause any organized trouble. I got Odin. Odin is beautiful in a frozen sort of way, but the prison life was BORING.

After six months I was contemplating the force bar at the door of my cell and wondering if it would fry me or just knock me out. I decided I didn't care. I woke up sometime later in the infirmary and thought, oh crap, now they're going to lock me in maximum. But instead they made me an offer.

"It's a shame to see your talents go to waste," they said. "Wouldn't you rather be on active duty again?"

"Sure," I said, thinking I could always give them the slip if I was.

They grinned like they knew what I was thinking. "You could have your sentence cut in half. Of course, you would be walking around on a minimum security leash — but you would be helping the war effort."

"I'm as patriotic as the next woman. What did you have in mind?"

They took me into another room and showed me a cat sleeping in a cage. "What does it look like?" one of them asked me.

I humored him. "A cat."

"Good," he said. "It's actually a genetic construct. Its brain is very much like a small version of the human brain, with memory and reasoning capabilities."

"No wonder you keep it locked up."

He frowned. "I didn't say it *thinks* like a human. That's where you come in."

"Where's where I come in?"

"We'll put your mind in her body." He patted the cat through the wire. "You're looking at our latest technology in espionage."

"You've got to be kidding."

"What we had in mind is an RNA virus. We'll introduce this virus into your brain. It will — ah — absorb your memories, your abilities, literally your mind. Once the virus has run its course we will introduce it into the brain of the cat. The process will reverse and your mind will be downloaded."

"No."

"Your own body will be safe and sound in deep sleep, right here in our lab. Once you've completed your tour of duty you'll get it back."

I told him where he could stick his "virus."

"You have plenty of time to change your mind," he said. Then they put me in a cell that was six feet by four feet. No window.

Within a month I was making them an offer.

I got eight weeks to prepare for the virus. I was switched to a luxurious maximum security area. They pumped me full of vitamins, and at night they hooked me up to sleep tapes so I could learn the Q'rin language. I got to exercise on a balcony suspended over Rainbow Gorge. It was supposed to give me the illusion of freedom.

On the last night they offered me a sedative, but I wanted to stay awake to savor the last few hours in my own body. I fed it and washed it and did other amusing things with it. But morning came just as fast as I had been unconscious all night.

"Hope you got a good night's sleep," the attendants said as they marched me down the hall. Their laughter sounded forced. No one looked me in the eye



as they strapped me onto a table and put me to sleep.

There was a long, bad time when I felt like I was falling into Rainbow Gorge. Then I opened my eyes to see a lot of colorless faces around me. "How do you feel?" a voice hollered at me.

"You don't have to yell," I said. Something vibrated in my throat.

I stood on four feet. I wanted to stand properly on my back legs, but I only got halfway there. "The operation is a success," Loudmouth told me.

"You didn't tell me I would be able to talk," I said, wondering what else they hadn't told me.

"Yet it was one of the first things you did," he said smugly. "Actually the voice box serves two purposes. First it allows you to express yourself — something we have found to be essential for maintaining the morale of our spies — and second it allows you to report back to us." He took out a light and shined it into my eyes.

"By the way," he said, "you might be interested to know that your downloading was by far the most successful we've ever had. Fascinating."

"You mean I could have been mentally retarded?"

He just smiled.

I wanted to scream at him, tell him what a brain mugger he was, but instead I cleaned my fur. The angrier I got, the harder I cleaned. Like I was trying to wash their dirt off me. "She is adapting very well," he told the others. Fine for you, I thought. I was beginning to make plans.

*** **

They assured me that as soon as I got used to it the cat body would be as easy to control as my own. The key words were *as soon as*. I'm still not entirely comfortable in this body. The cat has a way of taking control at the worst moments, like the time I saw a cockroach scuttling down the hall. Even as my voice was saying "Yuk!" my feet were moving after it. I chased it into a vent and — I ate it! It was horrible how much pleasure the cat's brain took in crunching it between her teeth. Afterward I threw it up, which was even more disgusting. When I told Loudmouth about it he smiled thinly and said, "I guess we don't have all the bugs worked out of the system." I resolved to shit in his favorite chair as soon as I got the chance.

*** **

"I have good news for you," Bigmouth told me one morning. "Tomorrow you're shipping out on the *Aguirre*."

"The mail ship? Why?"

"This run is going to take them through some of the worst ambush territory in this sector. We'll leak their whereabouts so the Q'r'in will be certain to attack."

"I bet they just love that idea."

"You're right. That's why we're not going to tell them." He sat down and pulled out a pipe that he always smoked when he wanted to look like he had all the answers. "In retrospect you'll understand that it was necessary. Some sacrifices have to be made."

I filed that away for future reference.

"What's going to keep me from getting my furry little ass kicked right along with theirs?"

"Your training," he said. "You'll be briefed on

exactly what to do when the time comes."

"And that's going to make all the difference?"

"We have confidence in you." He blew smoke over my head. "One other thing. None of the men on the *Aguirre* know what you are. You'll be an ordinary cat to them. It will be good practice, don't you think?"

That was an understatement.

From the moment I set foot on that ship I got patted and puss-pussed and fed the worst sort of food. My tail must have been stepped on at least a hundred times the first day, and there was one maniac who kept trying to kick me.

But others could be charmed into feeding me table scraps, and there were one or two beds I was welcome in.

The same box that enabled me to talk was also a transmitter that I could activate by making a special sound. My collar had a disk that had credit access if I needed it. It made me feel better to know I had it, but it didn't make living among giants any less harrowing.

And when the Q'r'in struck things got extra lively.

As soon as the warning lights were flashing I took my position by the airlock. I knew I wouldn't have long to wait. Certain pieces of equipment had been tampered with so there would be no chance of defeating the raiders. I had been warned that no RNA virus could salvage my mind from a dead brain, so I resisted the impulse to tell the others their numbers were up. It was too late for that anyway.

The inner lock was forced open and the Q'r'in came stomping through. The floor shook with their weight. I swallowed my doubts and made a mad dash for the airlock, darting onto their boarding craft, and hid under a seat. My cat body decided it was a swell time to take a nap, and for once I didn't fight it.

I don't know how I slept through their return, but when I woke up we were in transit back to their mother ship.

"What is that?" one of them was saying. I froze.

"It plays music," said another. "You listen through these things you put over your ears. And let me tell you, from the volume in this thing the human who owned it must have been deaf."

"You call that a war prize?"

I noticed no one said anything about prisoners. I wasn't sure I should be sorry about that. Loudmouth had told me about the Q'r'in prisoner-of-war camps. In any event, they sounded like they were in good spirits, so I decided to show myself.

I crawled out from under the seat and strolled to the middle of the aisle. All conversation stopped dead. I ignored this and cleaned my fur as if they weren't there.

One of them said something that translated loosely to, "What the hell is that?"

"Some kind of animal," another one said.

"I can see that, idiot. What *kind* of animal?"

I looked up and said, "Meow." It was a fake-sounding meow, but I was scared out of my wits.

"It looks like a rodent," said the second guy.

I tried not to shiver. I had seen Q'r'in before, but never from a floor level. They don't look too different from humans, I guess, if you don't count the fact that

they're over seven feet tall — every inch made of bone, gristle, and muscle — and their faces look like the stone mason who carved them was called away before he could finish.

The first guy put his hand out so I could smell it. I obliged. It smelled like salt. I gave it a small lick and rubbed my head against it, feeling like a whore. He made a sound that I learned to recognize as laughter. You know how humans go, "Hah hah hah hah" etc.? Well Q'r'ngo, "Hah."

"We might as well take it back to the *Hammer*," he said. "I don't think it will fit down the disposal unit."

They all poked and prodded me until we got back to their ship. The first guy even patted my head. But once we docked it was back to business. I was ignored while they got things unloaded. I hung around, since I assumed one of them could be persuaded to feed me.

Finally the first guy squatted next to me. "Perhaps you would like something to eat?" he said.

I purred my agreement.

He tucked me under his arm and walked with me through the crowded corridors. I tried to memorize all the twists and turns. We rode in an elevator and stepped out into a room full of screens and lights and weird Q'r'in military symbols. He walked up to the man in the central chair and saluted.

"Report, Morek," the man said without looking up.

"We have secured the salvage, my Lord, and it was almost too easy. Their equipment was in shameful condition. We salvaged very little of it. Fortunately their food stores were quite full."

"You executed the survivors?"

"As you ordered, Lord."

The man looked up and saw me. His eyes were deep, cold blue. "What is this?" he asked.

"It crawled aboard one of the raiders."

"Did you check it for vermin?"

"Yes," said Morek, though I didn't remember him doing so. "The little tag on its collar has a magnetic strip that is probably for identification in case it is separated from its owner."

Blue-eyes stared at me so long I almost swallowed my voice box. Finally he reached over and scratched me in a place that just happened to be itching. I felt Morek's body relax.

"You may go," said Blue-eyes.

"Lord Torril." Morek snapped a salute and turned on his heel.

As we rode back down the elevator I wondered if I had heard him right. The Q'r'in have a different system from ours, as you know, built around powerful families. You've probably heard of Lord Abraa Torril. It was just my luck to end up on his ship. If anyone could figure out what I was, he could.

I made my first transmission when Morek was asleep. Fortunately he slept like a log.

"Have made contact," I said. "Will keep you informed." I left it at that. Let them think I was so pressed I couldn't talk for more than a few seconds. I would provide just enough information to be moderately useful. I knew they wouldn't spare any more thought for destroying me along with *Hammer* than

they had for the men of the *Aguirre*.

In the next few days I followed Morek everywhere. It gave me the chance to familiarize myself with the layout of the ship and to show the crew that I was the pet of a high-ranking officer. Everyone was very careful not to step on my tail. But I still had to be watchful.

Once when I was wandering down one of the lower corridors I encountered the chief engineer and Lord Torril. Before I could beat a hasty retreat the engineer spotted me.

"There it is!" he said. "I've been wanting to get a closer look at it." He leaned down and scooped me up. I sat stiffly in his arms.

"What do you suppose its purpose is?" he asked Torril.

"It's clean, attractive — I assume it's a pet," said Torril.

If I could have, I would have blushed. Every time he looked at me with those blue eyes I was sure that he could see right through me.

"What sex is it?" The engineer wrenched my back legs apart. I twisted my head around and sank my teeth into his thumb. He dropped me like a hot potato. I retreated into a corner and hissed at him.

He hissed back at me. "I've been bitten by better!"

"She acts as any self-respecting female would," said Torril, a hint of a smile around his mouth. He knelt and held something out to me. My nose identified it as a piece of taarn, the closest thing the Q'r'in have to candy. I had already developed a passion for it. I took it from him and walked away, my tail high.

"Hah!" the engineer laughed. "With that tail anyone can see what sex she is."

Believe it or not, that was the first time I ever thought about that aspect of cat anatomy. It was disturbing, to say the least.

Even with heavy editing I had a lot to report in those first four months. And my reporting paid off — though maybe not for our side. It happened on a raid in Loop Sector, while we were harassing a nice fat freighter. We followed it into orbit around a scruffy-looking planetoid, and suddenly we had company. Three heavy cruisers, human. I was sitting on the back of Abraa's chair at the time.

He seemed almost interested for a change. Lots of times I'd seen him in heavy action and it never seemed to faze him, as if the whole human/Aesopian alliance was just an annoyance. His officers bared their teeth and shouted with pride while he sat like a stone.

Now he actually leaned forward in his chair.

"Tactical," he said. A grid covered the screen.

A plasma blast hit us dead on, and the lights flickered for a moment as the screens absorbed the blow.

"Navigator," said Abraa. "You will aim for quadrant seventeen, three-quarter speed."

"Done," said the navigator.

I figured we were going to slip past them, but as the flag ship loomed larger on the screen I realized we were going to ram it. Abraa was committing a glorious suicide and taking some of his enemies with

him. I dug my claws into the back of his chair so that three men could not have pulled me off.

We sailed into the other ship. I heard sounds of strain inside our own ship, but not the hemorrhaging I had expected. It was their guts that were spilling out, not ours. He had known exactly where to strike them so they would break.

"Full speed," he said. "Prepare to warp."

The other ships were hampered by the debris. One of them hung behind, perhaps to render aid to the survivors on the wounded ship, and the other had to steer a wide path around both. We were clear of them before they could prevent us from warping out.

Abraa turned to look at me, and laughed when he saw how well I was attached to his chair.

"Feeling jittery, Stripe?" he said, scratching me under the chin until my claws retracted. "What would you do if we were in a real battle?"

I gave him a withering look. If what we had just been through was not real, I didn't know what was. He continued to scratch me until I fell into a doze.

"Damage reports," he said.

I never heard the answer.

I woke up in an unfamiliar place. I was in another chair, so big I couldn't see out of it. I poked my head above an armrest and saw Lord Torril reclining on a narrow bed and scribbling in a journal. It was funny seeing him that way, so relaxed and off guard. I wondered if I should leave. He glanced up, and I started. He laughed, "Hah."

I was beginning to understand how much genuine humor was in that simple sound.

"We'll eat in a moment," he said. "I must finish writing."

That surprised me. No one bothers to write by hand anymore. But he seemed to enjoy it. He dipped his pen into a jar of dark, brownish ink and moved his hand in quick, precise patterns. I wasn't sure I could read handwriting in any language, but I knew I had to get a look at that journal.

Finally he got up and fiddled with the food dispenser. I figured we would be getting fancy stuff, but what came out wasn't any better than what Morek had been feeding me. He put my portion in a little dish on the floor and we both dug in.

Afterward I cleaned my fur while he watched me.

"You are a living work of art," he said. "You soothe and entertain the eye."

If he had said that to me in a bar I would have gone home with him for sure.

"You are — a companion of meditation." He stared around his quarters, taking stock of everything there and perhaps a few things that were not there. He picked me up and scratched my head. "And finally you are a balm for loneliness. I can speak to you as I can to no man or woman, my mute little friend. There is a space for you at the bottom of my bed tonight. Or perhaps you would prefer the chair?"

I felt that spontaneous purr vibrating in my throat. He patted me. He was totally off guard, just like I wanted.

And I was beginning to feel like a real shit.

I spent the next few sleep cycles in Abraa's big

chair, I ate with him, spent quiet evenings with him. During this time I gathered very little useful information. He never talked to me about anything of military importance. I was sure his journal would tell me more, if I could just find a moment to be alone with it. But he always locked it in a cabinet when he was done with it.

One night I woke up in the big chair and found myself alone. I sighed and stretched. Another useless evening. I had just about decided to go renew my friendship with Morek when I saw the journal on the bunk.

I had some trouble opening it with my paws. Eventually I had to claw the cover up an inch, push my nose under the gap, and practically crawl inside to get it open. I stared down at the alien letters on the page, hoping my sleep training would cover this situation. Finally it kicked in:

... one of the young lieutenants in the hall today with a human contraption glued to his ears. He did not see me until my hand was on his shoulder. I took it from him and put the earpieces to my own ears for a moment. The music was strange, frantic, complex — and on the whole quite entertaining. He seemed surprised when I handed it back to him rather than destroying it. The fool thought I was being kind. He will die without ever seeing his enemy because of that human device.

These young ones do not seem to realize how important it is to keep all their senses tuned to the universe. I hear them saying I am one of the old ones who hate everything alien. Perhaps that is so. The Aesopians are worthy opponents who understand the art of war, but humans should stick to doing what they do best: making music and painting pictures.

Must see if I can dig up more taarn for Stripe. Can't stand the stuff myself, but she....

The door to the cabin slid open just as I finished the page. I was so startled I knocked the book to the floor as I jumped down. The noise it made sounded like an explosion. I stood there and gazed into Abraa's expressionless face.

When I think back I realize that just about anything I could have done at that moment would have given me away. What I did do was perfect. I cleaned my fur, like any cat who has been caught knocking something off a shelf. Abraa picked up the book and scratched me on the head. He dropped it on his bunk and busied himself dialing up supper for the evening.

By the time I finished cleaning there wasn't a speck of dust on my fur.

I gave up on the idea of reading any more of Abraa's journal. It was too nerve-racking, and besides, what I had read had been personal enough to make me uncomfortable. Let the guys back at Central Intelligence sift through other people's underwear. That wasn't my job.

So I went back to my best source of information. Morek seemed happy to see me. A little jealous, too.

"You furry opportunist," he said. "Can't say that I blame you." But his words did not ring entirely true. He had seen how well I got along with Abraa, while the best he had been able to get out of me was an occa-



sional — and brief — purr.

His personal comm sounded. He didn't bother to put me down as he answered it. "Morek," he reported.

"Torril here." The voice sent a pang of guilt through my stomach. "I'm calling a meeting in the Security Room. Now. Be there."

"Yes, Lord."

Morek put me down, but I followed him out the door and down the hall. This was what I had been waiting for. The big stuff.

I had to run to keep up with him, so when the inner doors of the security room opened I shot through and right up onto the table. And stopped dead. There was a human in the room, and he was looking right at me. All the hair on my body stood straight up and I hissed.

The human backed away.

"What is that thing?" he said nervously. "Oh — yes, a cat. Where did you get it?"

Torril and his officers were staring at me in a bemused fashion. "It found us," he said. "It crawled off a human ship."

"Ah," said the human, and that was the end of it. They seated themselves around the table and sealed the inner door. My fur slowly returned to its proper position as I came to the conclusion that he didn't know what I was. But I felt about ten years older. In cat years.

"Ornin here brings me information I have been waiting for," Torril said, gesturing toward the human, "of the biggest ore shipment ever to be sent from Hook to the Ragnir front."

"Excellent!" said Morek. "We take the shipment."

"No," said Torril. "We take Hook."

There was a stunned silence. Hook was worth billions of dollars in minable ores. It was the asset that the human/Aesopian alliance could least afford to lose. It was also a strategic pain in the ass, resting too close to Q'rin territory and costing almost as much to defend as its net output. It was guarded with the best stuff the alliance had to offer.

"Oh," said Morek. He looked nervous.

Torril smiled. "Now you are going to find out what a war is really like. The shipment will be heavily guarded, depleting the forces around the planet somewhat. It's risky, but I don't have to tell you what it could do to further our efforts on Ragnir."

His officers murmured with admiration. His point wasn't lost to me, either.

So I listened very carefully to the rest of the meeting, especially to what Ornin had to say. He was a very odd man. I wondered if the Q'rin were so good with plastic surgery they could actually make themselves look human. Something nagged at the back of my brain.

At last the meeting broke up. Morek stayed behind to talk with Torril, so I stayed put.

"Is Ornin one of the *special* ones?" he asked.

Torril glanced at the open door. "Yes."

Morek shuddered. "I liked it better when we just brainwashed them."

"We still do that, to prepare them. So that their minds will not interfere with the virus."

Now I knew what was the matter with that human.

He had a Q'rin mind in his head. So they had it too....

"But to live in the body of a *human*—" Morek said. I wondered what he would think if he knew just what kind of body we humans could stoop to live in.

"Who knows why spies do the things they do?" said Torril. "They are a different breed."

"At least when his mission is over he can go back to his own body."

"No. Once the virus has picked a brain, the brain is useless. You wouldn't like to see what's left of it."

He might have said more than that, but I didn't hear him. My feet were running. They made me go around the room in tight circles, so fast I could hardly have been more than a blur. Then I was jammed between two pieces of equipment. I wanted to squeeze my brain right out of my body.

"Stripe!" I heard Abraa's voice behind me. He kept calling my name, his voice as soft and soothing as he could make it. He wanted to pet this disgusting little body of mine. I threw up.

"Can you reach her?" Morek said.

"She doesn't want to be reached. She'll come out when she's ready."

They must have gone right after that. I'm not sure. I crouched there for a long time, shivering and vomiting, like I wanted to escape through my own mouth. Finally I was too tired to do anything but lie there and think.

It had felt good those many months ago to shit in Loudmouth's chair. Now I wanted to do it down his neck. It was an encouraging thought.

I dragged myself out of the security room. When I looked up again I found myself in the corridor outside Abraa Torril's quarters. I lay down by his door and waited. Finally he entered the corridor and saw me.

"I was worried about you," he said.

That night I slept curled against his shoulder.

Soon Lord Torril's ship was flying regularly with two other battle cruisers and half a dozen scouts. He stayed well within Q'rin boundaries so we didn't look like anything more than a regular patrol. But the atmosphere on *Hammer* was too charged to bear out that illusion. Even the grunts, who were told the minimum they needed to know, were excited. Only Abraa remained the same. He scribbled in his journal and patted me on the head.

Though it did seem to me those blue eyes burned a little colder.

Two weeks to Hook we observed the first indication that the Alliance might be on to us. Three extra cruisers were patrolling the Alliance side of the border. Lord Ashren of Arrow called and demanded a meeting.

"We have a leak somewhere," Ashren said, looking coldly around the conference table.

"Of course," said Lord Torril. "That is the way wars are fought."

Ashren glared at me as I cleaned my fur. "What is that?" he asked. "Some sort of rat?"

Lord Torril was not disturbed by the increase in ships around Hook. He knew that when the ore shipment was under way the three cruisers would depart with it. He figured they were expecting his raid far-

ther along the route, in the Surahi sector, which was full of dangerously opaque stellar clouds. This is what his spies had told him.

We patrolled our border and waited. Twenty hours before the shipment was to depart we received our first challenge. It was from an Aesopian vessel. The captain was of the lion tribe.

"You are very close to Alliance space," he said, his impressive mane bristling.

"We are aware of the location of the border that separates our territory from yours," Abraa said.

"You look familiar," said the Aesopian. "You remind me of a wrestler I used to bet on at the pit fights on Z'taruh. He danced around his opponents as if he were a coward, but then he would attack at the least expected moment."

"You Aesopians are always backing cowards," said Abraa, and he severed the contact before the Aesopian could reply. The lion man did not attempt to speak to us again, and when the ore shipment left he left with it.

We disappeared beyond sensor range for a few hours.

I decided to take advantage of this time to make the transmission that would bring the Alliance cruisers back in time to save Hook. I found a secluded spot, coughed my transmitter on, and gave my code number. "Q'rin raid proceeding against ore shipment in Surahi sector," I said. "No changes."

I sat down hard and thought about what I had just done. My mind was full of incoherent images and emotions, Loudmouth's smirking face, my prison cell on Odin, the faces of the men on the *Aguirre*. My own face, the way it used to be.

"My god," I said aloud. "I'm a traitor."

I tried to tell myself that it was better this way, that maybe the war would end sooner. But I knew that was garbage. I had crossed the line.

Forty-eight hours after the ore shipment departed from Hook the Q'rin swept down on it, jamming all outgoing frequencies. They engaged the Alliance ships garrisoned around the planet and began to make short work of their depleted numbers. Abraa and I watched the battle from his chair.

He was hindered by the fact that he could not let the battle damage the planet surface. Better to use the plant and equipment that were already there than to build new stuff. He managed quite well; most of the sloppy work was done by Lord Ashren. Ashren even insisted on having a ship-to-ship discussion in the middle of the battle.

"It is going beautifully," he said to Abraa, as another of his poorly aimed bolts scored the planet surface. Abraa did not bother to take his eyes off the battle display on the main screen to answer.

"Yes," he said, "despite our handicaps."

"What do you mean?" demanded Ashren.

At that moment I noticed something that was lolling at Ashren's feet. It was a small bulldog. It had a collar just like mine. Its eyes were bright and intelligent.

"Abraa!" I screamed, "get this ship out of here! The cruisers are coming back!"

For a few seconds all eyes turned to me.

"That dog is a spy," I said. "They know you're here. It's a trap!"

Our ship took a heavy hit and Abraa turned back to the screen, his eyes full of murder. The lion's Aesopian vessel filled the viewscreen. I leapt from his chair and ran to the lift. It zipped open.

I ran to the transport docks just as the grunts were boarding the raiders. I slipped in with them and hid under a seat, praying that the ship would not be hit on its way down to the planet. It was a bumpy ride, but we made it. I ran out on the heels of the marines and jumped into the nearest ditch. And then, darned if I didn't fall asleep.

I woke up back on the *Hammer*. I was in Abraa's big chair, and he was standing over me.

"Your collar," he said almost apologetically, "was easy to track with a hand sensor."

He looked at me as if he fully expected me to answer him. And, crazy as it might sound, I wanted to talk to him. I was tired of playing the dumb animal. But I couldn't think of a damn thing to say.

"You warned me," he said finally. "I would like to know why."

I couldn't meet his eyes to say it. "They told me I would get my old body back."

"Ah."

"So what happened to the bulldog?" I said, my eyes still on the floor.

"Ashren skinned him alive. It told him a lot before it died. Were you a convict too?"

"Yes."

"What was your crime?"

I told him about the mock raid, the snoot, and the creeps on Odin. He took it all in with a stony face.

"You chose to be an animal rather than live in a cell?" he asked quietly.

"I did, but I had no idea what it would really be like. How could I? And of course, I thought I could be myself again."

So I had finally said it out loud. The whole hideous situation. When I was done I didn't even have the energy left to hold my head up. I rested it on the chair, my neck stretched out as if for the ax.

Neither of us moved or spoke for a long time. Then I said, "When are you going to kill me?"

"You are such a small thing," he said.

I looked up at him with my eyes, but left my head where it was. "So?" I said. "That didn't stop Ashren from killing the bulldog."

"Ashren enjoys that sort of thing. I do not," He sighed. "Your sacrifice of your body was for nothing. Do you know that? We have Hook now. The war will end soon."

"Tell me about it."

"I won't kill you," he said.

Now it was my turn to sigh. "Don't be silly."

"I am retiring soon. I have had little enough to interest me in the service for the last several years anyway. I'll take you with me."

He looked sincere. "You still trust me? After what

(Continued to page 58)



They Want Our Women!

By Greg Costikyan

Art by Larry Blamire

It was snowing gently in the woods above Freedom, New Hampshire. Two months of winter had already deposited several feet of snow on the ground; the pines bore heavy burdens of white. Soft drifts softened sounds; the only noises to be heard were the gentle susurrus of the wind, the soft scritch of subnivean mice searching for sustenance ... and the desperate whining of a flying saucer's engines, the sharp crack of tree limbs breaking, and a muffled thud as the saucer buried itself in the ground at an angle.

A door irised open, and Captain Zzlbrtz hoisted himself out using his anterior tentacles. You could tell he was a captain by the gold braid on his hat.

"Ffiglz, ye nit!" he roared. "Ye bluidy yobbo."

Ffiglz popped one eyestalk out the doorway, surveyed the damage, and yanked his eye back in as the captain turned.

"I saw that, Ffiglz!" yelled the captain. "Where did ye learn to drive, ye sassenach?"

Ffiglz drew himself through the doorway and addressed the captain apologetically. "Och, cap'n, 'tis sorry I am. But the padlotron is lesnerized."

"Lesnerized, is it? Well, get to work, mon! We canna lift from this benighted planet till yon padlotron is fixed."

"Aye, aye, cap'n," said Ffiglz unhappily. He retired to the ship.

The rest of the crew tumbled out. They examined the woods with interest. "Earrrrthgirls?" asked Qqxlip, rolling his r's.

"Yes, Qqxlip," said Captain Zzlbrtz lugubriously. "Earthgirls." He began to slobber slightly.

Qqxlip and Xxochi elbowed each other with their tentacles, and chortled hapily.

"Break oot the gravity sleds!" ordered Zzlbrtz. "Qqxlip, you, Xxochi, and Ttchwn take one and head doon to yon village. The rest of ye, spread oot and see what ye can find. Rendezvous here in nae more than an oor. Ffiglz!" He banged on the side of the saucer with one tentacle.

A muffled voice came from within. "Aye, cap'n?"

"Ye have an oor, Ffiglz, ye hear me?"

Inside the ship, Ffiglz began banging on the padlotron with a hydrospanner. "No bluidy sympathy for the working monster," he muttered to himself.

"Answer me, Ffiglz!" yelled the captain.

"Aye, cap'n, an oor," said Ffiglz, and flicked on Radio Edinburgh with a tentacle. Through some

bizarre combination of atmospherics and alien technology, it was the only station the flying saucer could receive, and the source of the aliens' knowledge of English.

While the tentacled creatures feverishly prepared, the woods reverberated to the sound of bagpipes. Mice and deer fled in dismay.

*** **

John and Janet Delbert owned a little white clapboard house on the outskirts of town. They were asleep upstairs in their big four-poster bed when the gravity sled sped up the driveway with a spray of gravel. Janet sat up groggily.

Qqxlip and Xxochi pulled themselves over the sled's side with their tentacles and grabbed stunners. "Keep the engine warm," Xxochi told Ttchwn, who sat in the driver's seat. Ttchwn stared at the heat gauge; the fusion engine was turning over at a nice million-and-a-half degrees.

Qqxlip and Xxochi charged across the porch and through the front door, which was, as usual in Freedom, unlocked.

Janet shook John. "John," she said, "what's that?"

John sat up in bed. "Eh?"

"I think I hear something."

There was a noise on the stairs. It was an odd sound; an alien with twelve tentacles doesn't make the same noise running upstairs that a bipedal human does.

John sat over the edge of the bed and put on his slippers.

Qqxlip slammed open the door and lowered his stunner. "Nyahahahaha!" he laughed in the villainous glee he knew was customary under these conditions.

John stared at him open-mouthed.

Qqxlip stunned John: circles of blue light spread outward from the stunner and struck John's body.

John fell back on the bed.

"Eeeek!" screamed Janet.

"I have you now, my lovely!" gloated Qqxlip thickly.

Janet screamed some more.

Qqxlip picked up her recumbent form and drooled on her.

Janet fainted.

Xxochi came through the door behind Qqxlip and poked Janet with one tentacle. "Och, Qqxlip," he said, "ye've kilt her."

"Nay, nay," said Qqxlip. "She's only fainted. 'Tis all part of the mating ritual."

"I dinnae," said Xxochi. "She looks dead tae me."

"Och, Xxochi, ye're sooch a worry wad. We'll take her back to the captain, and let him decide."

Pplip crouched against the side of the Morton cabin on the hill north of town. Cautiously, he sneaked one eyestalk over the window sill. Within, a form huddled under blankets, braids flopping over the side of the bed.

"Aye, there's a likely one," he murmured to himself. Carefully, he opened the window.

Betsy Morton stirred sleepily as Pplip cradled her in his tentacles, but didn't awaken wholly until he was striding through the woods.

She looked at the creature carrying her: tentacles waving all over the place, eyestalks circling to watch for pursuers, a green and brown invertebrate body. His body was clammy, and the air was freezing cold.

Suddenly, she squirmed.

"Stop that!" said Pplip.

She stopped struggling. "Put me down!" she said.

"I cannae do that, lass," said Pplip apologetically. "Ye're a girl."

"Of course I'm a girl!" she said.

"Well, then."

"Look, just put me down, okay?"

"Nay, nay, my lovely." He cackled half-heartedly.

"This is weird," Betsy said. "Look, where are you taking me?"

"Our ship."

"Your ship. You mean, like, a spaceship?"

"Aye."

"And when we get there?"

"We'll take ye to the stars!"

"Oh," said Betsy. "That sounds interesting." She had never been farther than Portland. At least she wouldn't have to put up with her ditz of a sister any more.

"Where we'll rrrrravish ye." He rolled the "r" in "ravish" lovingly. "Earth and its lovelies shall be ours! Nyahahaha!"

"Oh." That didn't sound quite so interesting. She didn't think she much liked boys yet, and certainly had no yen for some icky alien monster. She struggled some more.

"Stop that, ye little sassenach!"

They arrived at the ship. "Cap'n! Cap'n!" shouted Pplip. "I got one, cap'n!"

"Guid work, Pplip, lad! Let's see her, then!" Zzlbtrt began to slobber.

Pplip tumbled Betsy into the snow. She stood up, and looked up at Zzlbtrt defiantly. She shifted from one bare foot to another; the snow was cold.

Zzlbtrt turned an interesting mauve color. Pplip knew the signs of rage, and began to flee. "Ye fool!" roared Zzlbtrt, and began to pursue Pplip around the saucer. "Ye blithering idiot!" He rained tentacular blows on Pplip's fleeing form.

"What? What?" Pplip cried.

"Ye monstrous nit," shouted Zzlbtrt. "She's un-

derage, ye twit!" Around and around the saucer they ran, Zzlbtrt raining blows on his subordinate.

"But, but cap'n! How was I tae know?"

"The upper torso, ye fool! Look at the upper torso! She has nae bulges, nae characteristic sine wave shape! Ye'll have tae throw her back!"

Off in the distance, the alarm began to sound at the volunteer fire department. Zzlbtrt stopped to listen. "Och, that's it, then," said Zzlbtrt. "The toonsfolk are alerted to our presence." Pplip ran blindly around the saucer and collided with Zzlbtrt's rear. "Watch where ye're going, ye bluidy oaf!" roared the captain.

Betsy walked into the saucer; she hoped it was warmer in there.

Frank Johnson, the Fire Chief, was the first to arrive at the volunteer fire department. He found Sherm Frederick leaning on the siren.

"Sherm!" he shouted over the siren. "What the sam hell do you think you're doing?"

"Monsters!" Sherm shouted. "Monsters! All over town! They want our women, Frank! We gotta do something!"

"Goddamn it, Sherm," Frank yelled. "You're drunk." Sherm Frederick was a Democrat, everybody in town knew it; a no good, drunken bum who lived in a seedy little house on the edge of town with his surly wife and two destructive little boys.

"No I ain't, Frank," said Sherm. "Honest."

"Will you get off that goddamn siren? Everybody in town's heard it by now."

Sheepishly, Sherm switched it off. Three pickup trucks and a station wagon arrived at the station. A group of men walked up to Frank.

"What's up, chief?" said one.

"Sherm's drunk again," he said.

"Monsters!" said Sherm. "Ugly, slobbering bug-eyed monsters!"

One of the men sighed. "Right, Sherm. Laura know where you are?"

"They got Laura!" shouted Sherm, and began to cry.

"Keerist," said Frank. "Jeb, you want to take him home?"

"Guess so," said Jeb.

"I'll sound the all clear," said Frank, and turned to the siren.

Qqxlip, Xxochi and Ttchwn zoomed down the street in a grav sled, at least two feet above the road. The bodies of three women were piled in the back.

For a moment, there was a stunned silence, as the men stared down the road at the departing sled.

"That's them!" shouted Sherm. "That's them devils! C'mon boys, we gotta get our guns and get 'em!"

"Sumbitch," said Frank. "Guess you aren't drunk, Sherm."

"Jesus, Frank," said one of the men. "What the hell is going on?"

"Sure beats hell out of me," said Frank.

"Aliens!" shouted Sherm. "Alien monsters from outer space! Ravenous, slobbering bug-eyed monsters!"

Frank sighed. "Well, I guess maybe so," he said.

Ffiglz wrenched at the padlotron and cursed. Another of the aliens entered and dropped several comatose female bodies on the floor. Betsy recognized Janet Delbert and Avis Barton, the postmistress. She turned to examine Ffiglz. The bottom of his torso was completely smooth, bare of any organs or extrusions.

"Excuse me," she said. Ffiglz swiveled one eye away from his work and examined Betsy. "Aye, lass?" he said.

"How come you guys are interested in human women, anyway?"

"I beg yer pardon?"

"I mean, you aren't even vertebrates. You evolved on another planet. It doesn't make any sense."

"Och, lass, is it so hard to understand? Why do the bees buzz? Why does the sun shine? Who can answer sooch mysteries of life?"

"Bees buzz because their wings beat at a rate that's audible to human ears. The sun shines through nuclear fusion."

Ffiglz chortled. "Ye're a smart little one, I'll give ye that." He banged at the padlotron again. "Here, hold this, will ye?" he said, and handed her a hydrospanner.

Governor Barns was hung over. He'd swilled six beers the night before; it was the only way he'd been able to choke down the rubber chicken. Barns hated presidential years; senators, governors and representatives descended on New Hampshire by the truckload, and every one of them sponsored fund-raising dinners. You'd think somewhere *someone* would find a decent caterer.

Barns pulled on a bathrobe and walked to the study, trying not to waken his wife.

"What is it, Hornsmith? This had better be important."

Hornsmith sat in a red-plush chair, neatly dressed in a three-piece Brooks Brothers pinstripe with power tie. *Christ*, thought Barns. *At this hour of the morning? The man is inhuman.*

"Sir, we've received an extremely frantic phone call from the Fire Chief of Freedom, New Hampshire."

"Where's that? Carroll County, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. Ah, Mr. Johnson says that Freedom is under attack."

Barns was suddenly alert. "Attack? SPETSNAZ?" Prior to his election, he had made a career of anti-communism. Soviet commandos sprang instantly to mind.

"Ah, no, sir."

"Not the Russians? Who, then? Terrorists? What would terrorists want with some hick town on the Maine border?"

"Aliens, sir."

"Aliens?"

"That's what Chief Johnson says."

"Aliens."

"Yes, sir."

"I don't suppose you're talking about Mexicans, Hornsmith."

"No, sir. Ah, Johnson's words were 'ravenous, slobbering bug-eyed monsters from outer...'"

"Christ, Hornsmith."

"Shall I call up the National Guard, sir?"

"Hornsmith, are you out of your skull?"

"Sir?"

"Can you imagine what the Democrats would do with that? 'Barns Calls Out Guard to Fight Little Green Men.' I'd be the laughing stock of fifty states."

"Sir, Chief Johnson was extremely exercised."

"How does Freedom vote?"

"Ah, Carroll County is pretty solidly Republican, sir."

"All right, send someone down in the morning. In the meantime, Hornsmith, try to realize that this isn't Washington, D.C. This is New Hampshire, Hornsmith. Nothing happens in New Hampshire. Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts and Quebec are not about to launch a sneak attack. We don't have international crises at three o'clock in the morning — let alone interstellar ones."

"Yes, sir."

"You'd think we had nuclear missiles. 'Governor, we have evidence of an attack. I need your permission to go to DefCon Three.' You'd love that, wouldn't you, Hornsmith?"

"Ah..."

"Any more sci-fi fantasizing from you, and you're out of a job."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Hornsmith."

"Sir?"

"Buy a couple of suits at Sears, will you? This Brooks Brothers stuff will not go down well with the honest voters of New Hampshire."

Pplip huffed his way through the snow. He'd show them! Upper-torso bulges they wanted? Damn, but he'd find the biggest upper-torso bulges in town.

Mary and Fred Simpson lived down by the lake. They had a porn tape on the VCR, and were making out on the living room sofa.

Pplip crept in through the window, and stunned them both.

He pushed Fred onto the floor and scrutinized Mary's bulges. He saw what Zzlbrtz meant; they were certainly more prominent than Betsy Morton's. An unusual sensation came across him as he studied them; he began to drool. Just a little.

Moans and gasps continued from the television. Pplip turned to look at it, and when he did, he was fixated.

Acres and acres of naked flesh. Human bodies in remarkable contortions. Pulsating, glistening — things.

Pplip stood gaping at the TV for minutes. A pool of saliva gathered before him.

"The captain must see this!" he told himself. He studied the TV, then unplugged it, and carried it and the VCR out the window, Mary and her bulges already forgotten.

Fred awoke on the floor.

"Oops," he said. "Must have dozed off. You okay, honey?"

A gentle snore answered him. Fred put his hand in the pool of saliva. *Damn*, he thought. *Must be a leak in the roof. Now, why is that window open?*

*** **

A shot rang out and echoed from the hills. "Cut that out," yelled Frank. The fire station was surrounded by most of the men in town, dozens of vehicles, and more weapons than Frank Johnson had seen since Korea. Several of the more energetic men had gotten into the spirit with real burning torches. "Seen too many damn *Frankenstein* movies," Frank muttered.

"All right, boys," he said. "We know they're back on the hill." The crowd roared.

"Let's get them greenies, Frank!"

"Those bastards'll rue the day they took my Marsha!"

"Geez, Jimbo — I'd've thought you'd be glad to get rid of the old bag."

"You son of a..."

"Cut it out, cut it out," yelled Frank. "Save it for the damn Martians! Now, I don't want any more damn shooting! Too likely someone'll get hurt. Wait until we find the buggers — then open up. Got that, men?"

"Okay, Frank!"

"All right, then; follow me!" Frank started off toward the hill above town. With a cheer, the men of Freedom followed him, torches held high, hunting rifles brandished in the air. Despite Frank's orders, an occasional shot was fired in sheer exuberance.

*** **

The view screen filled with beige flesh. Moans filled the saucer.

"More! More! Aaah. Oh, God. More!"

The aliens were transfixed. Pplip glowed proudly at his success.

"Lower. Aaaaaaaaah. Uh... Oh! (Pant, pant.)"

Several of the women were awake by now; together, they woke the others.

"Mmmm, yes. Yes!"

One by one, the women sneaked out the open saucer door. None of the aliens noticed.

"Oh. Oh. OOOOOOH! Oh God."

Finally, all had left but Betsy Morton. She pulled on one of Zzibrzt's tentacles. "Captain?"

"Eh? Eh? What?"

"I know where you can get some more."

"More?"

*** **

"Frank Johnson! I do declare. And what might you be doing skulking around the woods at this time of night?"

Frank had trouble believing his eyes. There stood his wife Thelma, in curlers, bathrobe and fuzzy pink slippers. Behind her stood most of the town's women, clad in similar fashion, a sprinkling of snow in each woman's hair.

"Ah, hello, dear," said Frank. Behind him stood most of the town's men, in overalls, boots and parkas, carrying a wide assortment of hunting rifles, axes, kitchen knives, and even a chainsaw, all lit by burning torches. "Actually, we were looking for you."

"Well, you've found us. Time we were in bed, I

should think."

"Yes, dear, certainly. Ah, these monsters, ah, the ones with the tentacles, ah, how did you manage to..."

"Them. We left them watching porn flicks." Thelma sounded disgusted.

Frank was alarmed. "Porn flicks?" he said. "Did they, ah, do anything to, ah, I mean to say, are you, ah..."

Thelma smiled. "Never laid a tentacle on us."

"Oh. Ah, that's a relief. I mean..."

"Come along, now, Frank."

The men and women, together, headed down the hill and toward the main street, the men grumbling a bit. Most removed parkas and gave them to their wives.

*** **

David Morton usually opened up shop around seven. He rarely got much breakfast trade, but he wanted to be open to sell a dozen eggs or a package of bacon if someone needed them. A village store survives by the convenience and courtesy it offers its customers; supermarkets have better prices. As he was stacking cereal boxes, the cow bell he'd hung above the door rang.

His daughter, Betsy, came in, holding the hand of someone in a trench coat. The man in the coat had a toque pulled down low on his head, and wore dark sunglasses, though at seven o'clock in the winter it was still dark outside. David didn't recognize him.

"Dad," said Betsy, "I want you to meet a friend of mine."

David put down a box of Count Chocula and came forward, proffering his hand to the stranger. "Well, any friend of my daughter's is a friend of..." He realized he was holding a greenish tentacle.

David dived over the counter and came up with a baseball bat.

"Get away from my daughter!" he hissed.

"Oh, Daddy," said Betsy. "Don't be such a drip."

"Hoot, mon," said Pplip. "I mean ye no harm."

David lowered the bat slightly. "Then why did you kidnap the women?"

Pplip flushed puce; David could see it, even through the coat. "Och, well, ye know."

"No, I don't."

"Aye, well, that was a mistake, it was."

"C'mon, Daddy, he wants to buy a movie."

"You do?"

"Aye."

David put the bat down and straightened up.

"Well, I do keep some tapes in the back. For folks who don't want to drive in to Conway. But how will you pay? I mean, you coming from Arcetur or wherever. I take Canadian money sometimes, but..."

"I told them you'd take gold," said Betsy.

"Gold? Why sure, I guess so."

"Would a kilogram per tape be sufficient?" asked Pplip.

David's voice didn't seem to be working. Betsy nodded "yes" vigorously.

"A kilogram?" he squeaked finally. "Ah, sure, absolutely. No problem. A kilogram? Of gold?" Let's see, what is it, two point two pounds per kilogram? And sixteen ounces per pound? What was gold up to



these days?

"I ha'e a list of the tapes we'd like tae buy."

"Okay. Ah, I have a limited supply, but I can order anything you need...."

"Guid, guid. Ah, here it is. 'The Devil in Miss Jones.' 'Space Sluts in Bondage.' 'Dirty Girls From Dimension X....'"

David dived behind the counter and grabbed the bat again. "Get away from my daughter," he hissed.

"Oh, Daddy, really," said Betsy.

When the man from the governor's office arrived, he didn't find much to go on. Fire Chief Johnson denied requesting support from the National Guard; when pressed, he just muttered something about "that drunk Sherm Frederick," and ducked out of his office.

Everyone else evaded questions about the alien

invasion, too. They all seemed a little embarrassed about something. All except for Betsy Morton, who regaled him with stories of the aliens. "She's got quite an imagination," said her father proudly.

The Mortons are rich, now. Everyone always suspected they made a mint out of the high prices at the village store. They've bought a new car and added a room to their cabin, so now everyone knows it's true.

And every few months a trench-coated figure enters the village store at dark, and surreptitiously leaves a few minutes later with a package under its "arms."

Everyone knows Morton keeps porn tapes under the counter. Everyone knows, but no one discusses it. There aren't many secrets in a town the size of Freedom.

— ABO —



FROM THE BOOKSHELF

By Janice M. Eisen

Mythmaking

The Story of the Stone
By Barry Hughart
Foundation/Doubleday, 1988
240 pp., \$17.95

Barry Hughart's previous novel about "an Ancient China that never was," *Bridge of Birds*,

BARRY HUGHART THE STORY OF THE STONE



won the 1984 World Fantasy Award. I hadn't read it when I picked up his new book, but afterward I put a lot of time and effort into locating a copy. *The Story of the Stone* is a rare treat: original, very funny, and beautifully realized.

The main characters are Master Li Kao and his assistant, Number Ten Ox — sort of a Chinese Holmes and Watson, but

with better characterization. Master Li, who is much more disreputable than Holmes and at least as smart, is called on to find out what is plaguing a monastery where there have been some strange deaths and some even stranger supernatural phenomena. In this Ancient China, magic and ghosts are real.

The setting of the book is fascinating. Since I am no expert on China, it was not clear to me where history left off and fantasy began, but that made the book all the more enjoyable. To a twentieth-century American, the "realistic" sections are almost as fantastic as those involving the supernatural.

The novel is meaningful and affecting, but also filled with humor; I laughed as often as I held my breath. It also passes my prime test for a mystery: I was not able to predict the course of the story. The background has been (re)created with great skill. It's not long before you start thinking like an ancient Chinese, or at least Hughart's reconstruction of one. *The Story of the Stone* is — literally — wonderful.

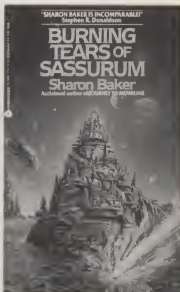
Rating: ★★★★★

Burning Tears of Sassurum
By Sharon Baker
Avon, 1988
280 pp., \$3.50

Sharon Baker's new novel is billed as a sequel to *Journey to Membliar*, but it is not so much a sequel as the second volume of a two-part novel. If you enjoyed *Journey* as much as I did, you will have been eagerly awaiting this book. If you haven't read the first book, I'd urge you to dig up a copy

before tackling this one. It will be confusing and much less satisfying if you don't.

Naphar is a phantasmagoric world of strange creatures and even stranger cultures. It was settled in the distant past by col-



onist "gods" who combined the genes of humans with those of native species to create three classes of humanoids: the giant Rabu, the small Kakanos, and the seldom-seen winged Beloved, also known as the Misbegotten. In the lowlands, the Rabu enslave the Kakanos; in the highlands, the situation is reversed.

In *Journey to Membliar*, Baker began the adventures of Cassia (a Rabu slave), Jarell (a Kakanos pleasure slave), and Tadge, Cassia's eight-year-old Kakanos nursling. Their quests — for passage off-planet for Jarell, and for the truth about Cassia's

RATING SYSTEM

★★★★★	Outstanding
★★★★	Very good
★★★	Good
★★	Fair
★	Poor

identity — embroil them in a battle for control of the planet between the worshippers of the Dark God Salimar and those of the Goddess Sassurum. The first book took them across Naphar to the capital and eventually into the caves of the Beloved, where *Burning Tears of Sassurum* picks up the story.

This novel, while well written and engrossing, is not quite as good as *Journey to Memblar*. One important reason is that the characters do much less wandering, so the reader doesn't get to see as much of Naphar. Also, Tadge, who was always a spoiled brat, has become extremely annoying. Another problem is that

watching Cassia develop in her new identity, but by the end of the book Jarell seemed a bit whiny. Phikola En, the high priestess of Sassurum, is a credible and ambiguous character.

There are some aspects of the plot that I don't like, but they are not of great importance. Baker is truly original, filling her novels with vivid people, places, and events. Despite its flaws, I recommend *Burning Tears of Sassurum*.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

Elf Defense

By Esther M. Friesner

Signet, 1988

234 pp., \$3.50

Elf Defense is a delightful light fantasy about an encounter between our world and the world of Faery. It uses some characters from Friesner's *New York by Knight*, but it works independently. The book is very, very funny, but you also care about the characters and get interested in the plot.

When Amanda Taylor, mortal mistress to the King of Elfhome Ultramar, flees Elfhome with her son by another man and her stepson Prince Cassiodoron, the King expects to have little trouble tracking her down. That's before he runs up against Sandy Horowitz, a lawyer with previous experience with elves. He throws everything from nixies and demons to dancing strawberries at Sandy, Amanda, and their allies, who fight back with good old American grit and legal obfuscation.

The book includes some wonderful turns of phrase: "a knit dress ... that's a recruitment poster for the La Leche League." The use of law against the elves is inspired — especially when it involves an updated Rumplestiltskin — and when the town turns out to fight the King's troops, you want to cheer. The book is silly, but Friesner never loses control. *Elf Defense* is wonderful fun.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Denner's Wreck

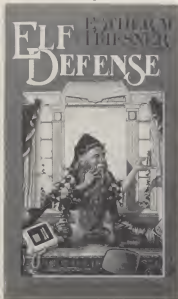
By Lawrence Watt-Evans

Avon, 1988

199 pp., \$2.95

Myth-making can be an excellent way to explain a culture and make it live for the reader, but most authors who attempt it end up sounding stilted or corny. Lawrence Watt-Evans, however, has succeeded at it in *Denner's Wreck*, a well paced, enjoyable SF adventure. The novel is reminiscent of our own myths and legends, featuring a mortal who gets involved with gods and turns out to be the only one who can save them.

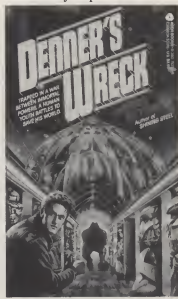
A colony ship crashed on the



Baker too often has characters say, "We don't have time for that now, tell me later," as a way of keeping important information from them. That's a cheat. She leaves a few loose ends as well.

On the other hand, Naphar remains a fascinating world, with a depth of detail that makes it utterly believable. Baker uses Napharese myths to illuminate it, and they work beautifully. The novel is suspenseful, with an involving love story as well.

Baker also has a gift for characterization; even the priests of Salimar are three-dimensional and interesting, unusually so for villains. I liked



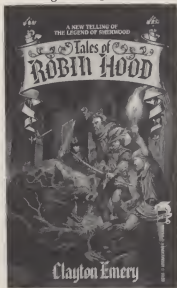
world known as Denner's Wreck thousands of years ago, and the society descended from the survivors has never moved beyond the primitive agricultural stage. Life for these people was disrupted several centuries before the novel begins by the arrival of immortal, all-powerful gods. As you might expect, since Clarke's Law is the book's epigraph, the "gods" are simply humans, and their "magic" is highly advanced technology.

A young, restless man named Bredon stands up to a god, and this act of bravery (or foolhardiness) puts him in the center of a war among the immortals. In

the process, he learns their true nature, and his own.

The immortals are well drawn and believable, including the villain, though the character of Lady Sunshine is a little one-dimensional. I believed that people might end up like that after living for centuries. The extremely high technology is portrayed credibly, without resorting to Gernsbackian gosh-wow. Things slow a little in the middle when there's a lot of explanation, for Bredon and for us, but on the whole the novel is well told and interesting. It is somewhat predictable and not completely original, but worthwhile and recommended.

Rating: ☆☆☆½



Tales of Robin Hood
By Clayton Emery
Baen, 1988
309 pp., \$3.50

Clayton Emery has written an enjoyable revitalization of the Robin Hood legend. Fantasy is woven in with the "historical" aspect, using the mythology of the time — the creatures of Faery.

The characters, especially Robin Hood, are well developed. However, the villains are overdrawn, with too much casual sadism, though I'm glad that the

author violated expectations by not making the Sheriff of Nottingham the villain. Robin Hood and his band are devout Christians, and the religious element is also well done.

I have mixed feelings about the book. The plot is interesting and the characters are intriguing. The author includes some great tidbits — I especially liked a warped retelling of the Hercules myth. Nearly every other chapter is written from the viewpoint of an animal; this sounds corny, but it works, mostly because Emery had the sense to keep these chapters brief. A flashback to Robin Hood's involvement in the Crusades is the most absorbing section of the novel.

The book has some serious problems, though. An early sequence with King Richard the Lion-Hearted, in Sherwood Forest *incognito*, is simply not credible. I can't believe that he would act like that, or that Robin Hood would, knowing whom he was dealing with. There's an implication that they have some history, but beyond bare outlines it remains unstated, and the outline seems to indicate that Richard should hang Robin at once for treachery.

The ending is unsatisfying; it seems deliberately left unresolved to allow a sequel. The plot is suspenseful, but I was disappointed when it was resolved by a *deus ex machina*. Also, occasional errors and anachronisms harm the credibility of Emery's detailed reconstruction of another place and time.

Despite these criticisms, I did enjoy the book. I just wish it had been better, since the characters are so intriguing. If you're at all interested in the Robin Hood legend, you'll have fun with it; just don't expect great things.

Rating: ☆☆☆

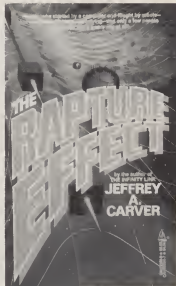
The Rapture Effect
By Jeffrey A. Carver
Tor, 1988
371 pp., \$3.95

Jeffrey Carver's latest book is an absorbing, suspenseful novel of first contact and interstellar war. It's a complex

book, requiring concentration from the reader, and is well worth the effort.

Humanity is at war with an alien race, the Ell — but almost no one knows that. The war is being fought by robot ships, directed by an intelligent "Gnostic" computer system owned by the McConwell Company. (A secret invention allows machines to traverse light-years almost instantaneously, but humans cannot survive transit.)

When the AI Core of the Gnostic system realizes that the war cannot be won, it seeks the help of our heroes in changing its programming so that it can communicate with the Ell and br-



ing the war to a halt. This mission is made even more urgent by the arrival of a human colonization expedition at the disputed world — full of colonists who don't know they're entering a war zone. The back cover compares the book to Heinlein's *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*; this is somewhat apt, though the Core never develops as much personality as did Mycroft.

The early part of the novel is the weakest. It includes a lot of boring pseudo-cyberspace stuff, and the characterization seems tacked on. But the characters fill out later on and my interest was quickly regained. The plot is in-

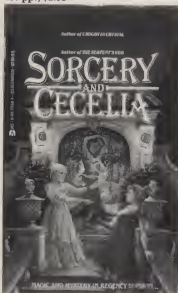
volution and unpredictable, and the sections told from the point of view of the Ell are very well done. The book's ending is excellent: upbeat without being Pollyanna-ish.

There are some minor flaws. The character Sage's neuroses became annoying, and the motives of the Company remain unclear. These are quibbles, though. On the whole, *The Rap-ture Effect* is a strong novel, and I recommend it.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Sorcery and Cecelia

By Patricia C. Wrede
and Caroline Stevermer
Ace, 1988
197 pp., \$2.95



Sorcery and Cecelia is an unusual cross-genre book: an epistolary Regency romance/fantasy. Since I am not a fan of Regency romances, I wasn't sure I'd like this novel, but I very much enjoyed it. It's good fun and a quick-paced read.

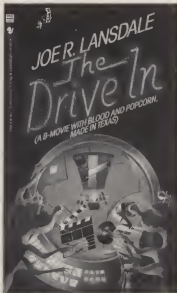
The plot, as you'd expect, consists of two main romances and a battle by good magicians against evil ones. The protagonists are sensible female characters who manage to keep their men from totally screwing things up, even when they're not trusted with the details. There's no bodice-ripper stuff (I know, some of you are disappointed).

There is an inherent problem with the epistolary format: there is no real suspense when a character is in a life-threatening situation, because she must have survived to write a letter about it. That doesn't really matter, though; a tightly woven plot is not what this book is about.

The authors have caught the Regency atmosphere and style well, but with a bit of good-natured parody. While this novel would not stand up to critical dissection, it held my interest and kept me smiling.

Rating: ☆☆☆

The Drive-In: A B Movie with Blood and Popcorn



Made in Texas
By Joe R. Lansdale
Bantam/Spectra, 1988
192 pp., \$3.50

I'm not sure how to describe *The Drive-In*. The publisher's publicity material uses words like "gonzo" and "off-the-wall." They're appropriate. The science-fiction label is not, though — it's horror, maybe dark fantasy, depending on where you draw the line. It's weird and not to everyone's taste, but it worked for me.

The plot is equally difficult to describe. An enormous drive-in theater which is holding its week-

ly all-night horror marathon is somehow cut off from the outside world, and it's not too long before the situation degenerates into a war of all against all. Eventually a strange phenomenon creates a two-headed Popcorn King who spews some rather unusual-looking popcorn from his mouth to feed his subjects. There's religion, sex, death, hypoglycemia, and even a crucifixion. I think the author's seen too many cheap horror flicks.

If you like a tidy ending, don't read this book. The reader is never sure quite what happened, though it may involve the B movie gods. Then again, it may



not. Nothing is explained.

The Drive-In is truly horrific but believable in its portrait of human brutality under stress, yet leavened with black humor. It's written with a wink and tongue in cheek. The humor is distancing, making it a little harder to take the book seriously. Read this novel when you're in a strange mood.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

Falling Free

By Lois McMaster Bujold
Baen, 1988
307 pp., \$3.50

I was very disappointed by

Lois McMaster Bujold's new novel, *Falling Free*. It starts off well, but becomes predictable and uninteresting toward the end. In the second half of the book, Bujold turns her concentration from the characters to the machinery, and I felt let down.

The "quaddies" have been genetically engineered to live and work in free fall: they have a second pair of arms instead of legs, and there are some less visible changes as well. The first batch has just reached adulthood and is about to be sent out to work when a new invention makes the whole project pointless. The evil businessmen in charge of the project will destroy the quaddies — but not if Leo Graf, a heroic engineer, can stop them.

The first half of the novel is pretty enjoyable, as the reader learns about the quaddies, how they live, and how they view the world. Once they start working on their escape, though, it turns into adventure-by-the-numbers. It's like putting a program into a computer and watching it run. We know how the plot's going to turn out; the only interesting thing is how they get there, and I didn't find Bujold's version terribly interesting. The story also features far too many rivets for me. Long descriptions of engineering processes bore me to tears, but if you like them, you'll enjoy the book more than I did.

The book goes by the numbers down to the romantic interest between the main male and female characters, which seems tacked on to fit the mold rather than growing out of the characters' relationship. And as if it weren't already obvious who's the black hat and who's the white, Bujold stomps it in by making the main villain more and more paranoid, sleazy, and sadistic as the story continues, until he's a murderous lunatic by the end. There are a couple of characters whose positions are more ambiguous, and they could be fascinating, but they play very small roles.

Bujold is a good writer and knows how to tell a story, but the

one she's told here is too familiar and predictable.

Rating: ☆☆

— ABO —

Against the Ebon Rush of Night

By Bruce Boston

*Our near immortal historians,
who lived the eons they describe,
now clothe the past not in events,
mere stitches in the warp of space,
but in waves and pulses of racial death
and racial consciousness formed again,
not in systems which rise and fail,
but in each species' finite travail,
the generations of life force spent
against the ebon rush of night.*

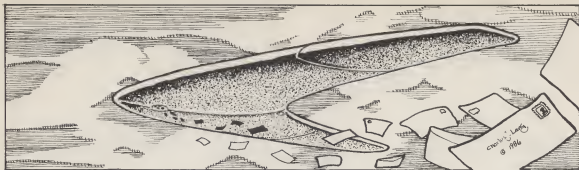
*Our near visionary prophets,
illuminati all to the fifth degree,
have foreseen the oncoming expiration
of our species' evolutionary seed,
and warned the present of future wars
and someday kings and alien dreams
which will transpire before our eyes,
they've cast tomorrow on fallen skies
and traced our waning souls' descent
against the ebon rush of night.*

*Our near omniscient scientists,
grave as truth in their gilded labs,
recombine the elemental strands
of genetic lace to fuse our cells
with breath, our veins with fire,
to give the lie to cosmic fate
our polyclones are cloned again,
we fashion landscapes without end
where light can flare and break
against the ebon rush of night.*

*In the far realms of sovereign space
where stars and worlds begin to thin,
and the darkness of intergalactic
wastes begins to dominate the mind,
the technosavages storm our gates,
barbarians who share their flesh,
artless creatures fiercely bred
who plunder parsecs as they spread,
exultant with their swift ascent
against the ebon rush of night.*

— ABO —

© 1988



Boomerangs

Comments From Our Readers

Dear Sirs and Madams:

Please renew my subscription to *ABO* for another 18 issues. Enclosed is \$30.

I have found *ABO* refreshing and quite entertaining. It is a good mixture of satire, reviews and good literature. While the "newspaper" format was quite innovative and practical, I find that I am more comfortable with the familiar magazine format, and the full-slick is beautiful. Congrats. Keep up the good work.

Brian D. Oliver
Lake Oswego, Oregon

Dear Crazy Alien,

I have some most urgent news that just came to light from my interstellar satellite message receiver late last Monday evening from your home world of Savilan. (*Huh?* — Ed.) The notorious bounty hunter Craig Mason, an ex-Fed jump trooper from the 305th Jump Trooper Division, has six warrants and a reward out for your arrest for jumping bail.

The reward is posted at 10,000 mega credits. The first warrant is for dealing illegal goods across the corporate triangle. Second warrant is for interstellar traffic citations and hyper speeding tickets that you've neglected to pay to the Galactic Patrol for over three years since your sudden disappearance from Savilan (*Where?* — Ed.) just to name a few You're also due for trial on the first of April for a few misdemeanors such as disturbing the peace with loud New Age music, throwing wild stag parties until three a.m. and you're sought for three incidents of indecent exposure and resisting arrest by officer Gris of the Apparatus when he attempted to detain you for selling illegal narcotics to Lombardhiss while visiting Voultar, and another fine was imposed for not paying your annual taxes to the

Savilan IRS. Naughty, naughty

Hootch! Sounds like you were one busy alien. Oh, yes — I almost forgot. Your wife, Nikitalan, has sold the house and your favorite aircar, the one with all the James Bond gadgetry, to help pay for some of your fines, but she'll forgive you once she knows where you're living. She knows that you're somewhere in the Milky Way.

I was sort of vague about telling her the details. Your four offspring are looking for their lost allowances and your wife gave birth to quadruplets just after you left.

I hope you get these messes cleared up. I'd hate to see you get caught or lose your job. Well, hang in there.

Your friend
Lazer Man
Seaside, Calif.

P.S. Church Lady would like you to drop by the studio sometime during the week when you've got the time to do an extra special televised interview with her. She said that you might have been under a lot of Satanic influences since you left your home world.

(We don't believe a word of this malicious attack on the integrity of our alien publisher, but then, again, we can't say it isn't true either — at least not until we catch the stinker. Then we're sure it will turn out to be the wrong frog, or that Lazer Man had too much pepperoni pizza the night before he wrote this letter. — Ed.)

Dear Charles C. Ryan,

If many *ABO* copies followed in the tracks of the one destined to join my collection, I can certainly understand your frustration at how poorly issue No. 8 traveled through the mail. My issue-to-be must have met up with a time warp or a black hole (I'm being kind and not saying "or the U.S. Postal Service") I never received it.

And what was worse, I didn't know it! At least, not until a friend and colleague brought his copy of *ABO* into work to show me "a new SF magazine." I got all holier-than-he and said, "Oh, yes, I already subscribe," and then he hands me an issue that I don't have. Instant ego-deflation! (I guess I'll never learn.)

As I scanned it, I was struck by the coincidence of my situation and your response to Richard E. Grant from Spokane about letting you know about missed issues! How the Fates conspire. Well, Charles, I'm letting you know that I didn't receive a copy of No. 8, as my friend cut an ad out from the middle, the first page of "Boneflower." Can you fix this? (Okay. — Ed.)

Since this is costing 25 cents anyway, I'll add a few comments. Thanks for resolving my unanswered questions about the fate of *Galileo*: I subscribed, enjoyed and then wondered when it stopped showing up. The first two conditions are true again with *ABO*: I sincerely hope the third is not forthcoming. I've gotten the message, so to do my part, enclosed is a self-renewal on my subscription. Also enclosed in this mess is a SASE for writer's guidelines.

I would like to express my support for one point in Ben Bova's objection to Janice Eisen's review of *Ether Ore* by H.C. Turk: a reviewer should read a book in its entirety in order to responsibly and honestly write a review. Any reviewer who doesn't deserves to be called on it, whether the review is positive, negative or neutral. While I appreciate her honesty in admitting she hadn't read the whole book, I was surprised that Ms. Eisen would say so, while making judgments about the entire reason for the book's being. Expressing opinions about matters of taste is one thing; doing so in a semi-public forum for an audience seeking input to use in judging what to read is another. I see a

reviewer as being in a position that demands those opinions be firmly based in reality, that means, at least, reading the whole book.

I have found some very good work in *ABO*. I plan to keep looking. Keep it up and thanks.

Sincerely,
Susan C. Winters
Bristol, Connecticut

Dear Sir,

I really like your magazine and think you are doing a great job. I was on spring vacation when your magazine arrived so I missed my Automatic Renewal Notice. I don't mind paying the extra money. When I first received your magazine I was a little unhappy but now I think I got a real bargain. I am a high school student and I do write SF but not on your scale yet. I hope to one day though. I am writing to both renew my subscription and tell you I will be moving June 1. I plan to renew my subscription for a year.

Yours truly,
Frank Bainbridge
Birmingham, Alabama

Dear Editor:

This is the first time I've ever written to a magazine, but I just had to take a few minutes to congratulate you and your staff for producing something so enjoyable as *Aboriginal Science Fiction*. I know you probably get many such requests, but could you please send me a copy of your writer's guidelines? (Yes, as long as you include a SASE (self-addressed, stamped envelope). — Ed.) Having been a writer for over ten years, I felt it was time I gave short fiction a fair chance. I am enclosing a self-addressed, stamped envelope for your reply. Thank you, and again congratulations and keep up the great work.

Sincerely,
M.A. Martin
Arvada, Colorado

Dear Sirs:

I count myself among your intelligent subscribers, so I am sending a check to self-renew.

I much admire what you have done with your magazine in so short a time. It's great! I love the short stories, and I like reading those of new writers. However, don't forget that there are established writers — I would encourage you to solicit a story from Harlan Ellison. He is my favorite author, and (I'm sure you are aware) is a great writer.

Keep up the good work.
Connie L. Riley
Richmond, California

(We will have an essay by Harlan in the next issue and expect a story from him one or two issues later. — Ed.)

Dear Mr. Ryan:

First off, what you have in-
advertently done (I hope you didn't

accomplish such torture on purpose) is cruel beyond what one normally expects from a magazine that one subscribes to. Torn, lost, even pre-read editions are to be expected. But, I'm getting lost in the joy of ranting and forgetting to state the problem.

I waited three long months for my subscription to start! (Sorry. — Ed.) Three months of a good friend raving over your magazine. That, however, is not the problem. Finally, my copy of the January-February edition came. I was thrilled! "Solo for Concert Grand" was wonderful. Alas, I finished too quickly and settled back to wait for the next issue ... which came the very next day.

So you now know the problem. I have been trained with two great awards to sit by my mailbox and wait for the *ABO* that comes every day. I am doomed to disappointment and it's all your fault.

Thank you and speed up the good work,

Denise M. Snider
Orange Park, Florida
(An *ABO* a day. Hmm ... not a bad idea, though I'd need a few clones to get it out. — Ed.)

Dear *ABO*,

What an outstanding magazine! I received my first issue (March-April '88) and then I received your special package of all previous issues. It was a little confusing in this order but I consoled myself with "the rest will be along soon and explain who 'The Alien Publisher' is." Now that it is cleared up it makes perfect sense. Thanks for letting me in on a great deal. That of course includes "Alien." How about calling the A.P. "Allie"? It is a nice generic name. Not male, not female. What do you think?

I personally do not care for "shiny" paper, but it does make better reprint quality. The 50-pound white paper was great, too. The size is more convenient now but the size before seemed like I was getting more (illusion?), nevertheless, BRAVO!! Unsurmountable quality, size, color, stories, content ... now I have left something out — Oh! Yes! — the art work. Now who am I kidding? The artwork is superb, bordering on phenomenal, especially the B/W picture to the story "Bridge of Silence," in the December '86 issue. Come on, People, this picture really should have been in color, it was breathtaking. It reached out and grabbed me. I stared at it for at least an hour — before I read the story, which was a let down after the artwork. Oh well, some things have to be better than others. It was this picture in particular that caused me to write of my elation with your ingenious magazine. (Of course I have not finished reading the rest of the magazines you sent, so I may be forced into writing further salutations.)

Well, now that I have expounded the good points I will get on to the bad points.

(Who am I kidding? I can not find

any, yet, but I will continue searching and searching and....) (The illustration by Carl Lundgren was one of the few done in black and white so we couldn't reproduce it in color. — Ed.)

Yours in trust,
Kimberly Ann Worley
Metairie, Louisiana

Dear Editor,

Thanks for reminding me about my subscription, I was reading the code backwards. I'm always a bit apprehensive about Fan Magazines now. Not because of the date but because of the content material. (We are a prozine. — Ed.) In times past the field was pretty clean and one could buy just about anything and not have to worry about what was in it. But nowadays Sex and Graphic Violence turn up anywhere and everywhere and unfortunately (as I see it) even in Science Fiction. While I think of myself as not a prude and even open-minded, I wish there were a lot less of these two subjects in the field. I can appreciate the necessity of it in movies like *Alien* and *Aliens* (which by the way I have not seen because of the violence). But does it need to be so prevalent throughout the field? I used to read SF books over anything else. I would even go without food to purchase a good SF book. But nowadays I don't purchase nearly as many as I used to. I have a small modest collection of some 2,500 books, and still like to keep up on what's happening in the field. But with all the "garbage" now, I'm quickly losing my interest. Take for instance *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (As Henry Youngman would say, PLEASE). There was an episode where the crew went down to a planet and everyone was wearing next to nothing and playing around. In the previous series sure Jim was playing around but it was kept discreet. I guess my point is I hope you don't go in for that type of material in your publication. It is a good one and I for one would like to keep it that way. OK. I'm ready to accept all the flak from your other readers telling me how naive and wrong I am.

As long as we're on the subject of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, I have not seen any reviews of the series. I for one (being a fan of the earlier series) am not too excited about the series in general. It seems they have made the captain out to be a wimp full of indecisiveness. He seems never to be involved in any of the action of the landing parties. I know that was a major criticism of Kirk. That he was too much involved in the activities. But if it was to be as I once heard said, that the series was to be the Horatio Hornblower of space, then it was imperative for the captain to be involved. Just look at Leslie Nielsen as the captain in *Forbidden Planet* — he didn't stay at the ship and just wait for things to happen. Speaking of bad characterizations; the woman doctor

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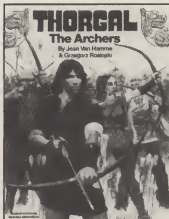
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— ♦ —
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just doesn't have the same chummy, witty, downright homey personality that McCoy was so blessed with. Besides, where did all the kids come from, like Wesley? If they were put in the program to appeal to the kids at home then they have lost me. Not to mention the psychic and Data (did it really take two parts to replace Spock?) seem to be undeveloped. The psychic need not even be in the cast. The best character in the show is the Klingon. I wished they would not have added him to the *Enterprise* crew, but kept him as a captain of his own vessel. As for the Ferengi, they are hopelessly inane and (I'm sorry) dumb.

There was a rather poor attempt at tying the two series together with the cameo appearance of McCoy. But then what of Kirk and when did the Klingons become so buddy buddy with the Federation? Wouldn't it take several years for a Klingon officer to make it through Starfleet Academy? Let alone make it to an officer on the bridge of a starship? Too many questions and not enough sound answers for me. I'll stick to the reruns and my own copies of the previous, and I feel much better, series. One last tidbit: I think I'm one of possibly very few people who really liked the first *Star Trek* movie. Over and above any of the others. *ST IV* is my second favorite followed by *ST III* and *ST II* last.

Lastly, I liked the movie reviews in your first issues but then you seemed to stop them. Was it because there weren't any movies to review or there weren't any reviewers? Are you going to include any of these in future issues? Thanks for your efforts in publishing *Aboriginal Science Fiction*. And please keep it clean. (We do plan on more movie reviews as soon as we have the time to find a reviewer.—Ed.)

Thank you for taking the time to read this rather lengthy letter. As long as I'm renewing my subscription I wanted to send a few of my thoughts along with it.

Sincerely,
George H. Peterson, Jr.
(Unfortunately questions of violence and sex — clean or otherwise — are largely subjective. We are not actively looking for stories containing either, but then again we aren't going to reject a good story that contains either, unless it is too graphic. The letter from Dwight Clark, for instance, indicates a preference for ray-gun violence. When is violence, or sex, too graphic? It depends on the reader as each reacts differently. We look for good stories, then have to evaluate their use of sex or violence. Remember, though, that for each reader who doesn't want either, there is a reader who does. The ultimate value judgment is subjective.—Ed.)

C.C.R.!

This is a first! I have never before written to a magazine, but I had to let
PAGE 54

you know that I am already a life subscriber to *ABO* (enclosed is my order for 21 issues at least), and that I am exuberant over the job you are doing with it.

I really appreciate your effort to keep the stories on consecutive pages, as it always has been an irritation to have to skip all over a magazine in order to complete a story.

Though I am not personally interested in the artwork, it is a pleasant aside, and the reading material has been great, as well as the editorials.

As a long addicted science fiction buff, I do, however, have one suggestion. How about, in some issues, a feature article of greater length? Though the short stories are good, they seem to only whet my appetite for some serious reading.

Either way, though, you have my subscription!

(We do occasionally publish longer stories ("The Milk of Knowledge" in *ABO* No. 6 and "Impact" by Ben Bova in *ABO* No. 9), but even longer stories are contingent on more advertising.—Ed.)

Sincerely,

David L. Evans
Johnsonville, South Carolina

Dear Mr. Ryan:

I found a copy of the March/April '88 issue of *ABO* (No. 9) tucked away in an obscure corner of the magazine rack at a local bookstore. I read a great deal of science fiction and fantasy, but even so I think your magazine stands out for several reasons.

The stories were thought-provoking and well-written. I especially liked the mix; the story by Ben Bova provided a useful side-by-side comparison with the stories by less well-known writers. I have just started writing myself, so I really appreciated the opportunity to be educated as well as entertained.

The artwork was gorgeous, but I have mixed feelings about being presented with so much visual imagery. One of the things I like best about *SF* is the chance to imagine for myself the characteristics and appearance of other worlds, life forms, and technologies based only upon a writer's description. At times I felt as if I was being cheated of the privilege to "see for myself" in my mind's eye. However, you have certainly succeeded in putting together a product that is striking in presentation as well as content, so I don't want to be too negative on the subject.

The columns were engaging, a delightful contrast to the sometimes gloomy fiction. However, I gathered from your publisher's comments that if I ever come across a strange-looking creature lolling around a junkyard, I should leave him/her/it/whatever alone. Too bad; I would have enjoyed the conversation.

What really struck me were the letters. *SF* fans can be an enthusiastic
Sept./Oct. 1988

lot, but it seems that you have the makings of a cult following here. Also notable (and slightly daunting, given my own ambitions) were the large percentage of aspiring writers among the correspondents. Not daunting enough, though; my *SASE* is enclosed, so I would appreciate it very much if you would send me a copy of your writers' guidelines before you run out.

I might suggest that you stick a label on the cover of the next issue, or at least on the mailing "baggie." It should read "CAUTION: This magazine may be habit-forming. Do not undertake to read it unless prepared to ignore work, family, and other distractions until finished."

I'm putting my money where my mouth is. Enclosed is a check to cover the cost of a one-year subscription plus back issues Nos. 1 through 8.

Sincerely,
Scott C. Miller
Little Falls, New Jersey

Dear Sirs,

I have enjoyed your magazine and its fresh approach, when compared to the Ziff-Davis factory work.

I'm renewing my subscription and if possible I would like to have issue Nos. 1, 2, 3, as part of my subscription, or barring that deduct their cost from the amount and give me a shorter subscription period.

Thank you,
Charles E. Thomas, Jr.
Richmond, Virginia

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Having recently obtained a copy of *Aboriginal SF* (September-October '87) I would like to compliment you on the production of a superb magazine. The quality of all the stories was excellent, and it is a measure of the craftsmanship of the authors that reading your selection re-awakened in me the same sense of wonder and pleasure that I experienced when first beginning to read *SF* about twenty-five years ago. I never thought that it would be possible for any fiction to do this, but I am delighted that you have managed to prove me wrong. May you long continue to do so.

A question concerning submission of material — I write *SF* myself, and until recently was editor of a small press short story magazine of *SF*/Fantasy with a very small circulation. Whilst I appreciate that you cannot publish previously printed stories, would this rule strictly apply to a small press, and virtually in-house, magazine of a writer's group? The fourteen issues we published contained some material which, I am sure, would be suitable for *Aboriginal SF*, and I would be very grateful indeed if you could clarify this point. (We don't publish reprints of stories published in the U.S.A. But we do reprint stories published in other countries that have never been circulated here. We'd need to know more about your magazine's circulation and distribution to decide.—Ed.)

My best wishes,
Bernard Smith
Northampton, England

Dear Mr. Ryan,

The look of a magazine isn't everything, though I must confess that it does make for a more enjoyable read. Still, you don't sell it just because of its appearance. There must be enough substance within to keep the reader interested. Not just a few selected readers do you have to appeal to, but those who want a wide variety of stories. Now Hugo and Nebula award winners make for great bragging that will hopefully lead to more readers and subscriptions for you. None the less, I have yet to read a single Hugo or Nebula story that wasn't boring as all get-out, and didn't leave me with the feeling that I had just wasted my time. It is not that I don't like message stories, I do, that is if they are done in the style of Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* TV shows.

Therefore, with this renewal, I must serve notice to you that I shall not resubscribe to your magazine next time unless you can once in awhile sneak in a purely entertaining story with no hidden or hinted at themes. An old-fashioned "good guy" vs. "bad guy" with a thrill-a-second story line featuring "ray guns" galore and Science put back into the science fiction. Not this eggheaded drivel of a psychically disturbed concert pianist who travels to alien worlds to play for the populace, which merely puts me to sleep. Such stories are okay for some, but if you want to keep getting my hard-earned cash, you'll have to let your Hugo and Nebula standards slip ever so often. (How did you know we were going to be nominated for a Hugo? We normally attempt to provide a mix of stories, including the ray-gun type, but get few acceptable ones in the mail. Maybe you should write one. — Ed.)

Thanks for listening,
Dwight G. Clark
Royalton, Vermont

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Keep up the good work! The magazine is the best SF I've ever read, and the art is great, too. I'm glad to see the plastic bags on my subscription copies, but I must say that the cover ink and sometimes the inside ink comes off on my hands and smudges (a small price to pay for the enjoyment). My father loved his gift subscription and is currently catching up on your first six issues, which I got but he didn't. Enclosed is my renewal for 18 issues, and thank you for doing such a great job.

Eric Myerson
West Roxbury, Mass.

Greetings *Aborigina*/SF,

Please renew my subscription. Enclosed is my check for another six issues. I really appreciate your magazine. First I read your book reviews, then go back to the short stories and

read every one of them. I love your format, paper, readable large print, and appreciate the plastic covers used on the most recent issue. Being a postal worker, I know that no matter how careful we employees are, magazines get torn en route in spite of our efforts. Plastic covers help tremendously.

I like your idea of an "alien publisher," but the cartoon caricature looks like he came from a 1950's pulp. (He probably did. — Ed.) There must be a more imaginative artist out there somewhere.

If it's not too much trouble, could you send me a guideline for prospective writers for your magazine? I enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Thank you,
Louann Linville
Nampa, Idaho

Dear Charles,

I have just received your renewal form — sorry I had intended to renew early to avoid the form but let you beat me to it. My subscription will expire with issue No. 12; I had planned to renew this month thinking that would be plenty of time. Oh well — "so it goes."

I have enjoyed *ABO* quite well, thank you. I must confess though that I haven't found time to read them all yet. I read your editorials (enjoyed them) and the book reviews (excellent — I do appreciate this column), and several stories, etc.

I haven't read a SF magazine in several years, though I am an avid SF book reader. I finally quit reading *Asimov's* because I got very tired of reading it, if you know what I mean.

Thanks for an excellent magazine. Keep up the good work!

Aboriginally yours,
Roger Richmond
Kingston, Tennessee

Dear ASF,

I think your magazine is wonderful. I just subscribed and I must confess that my studies are seriously neglected the day your new issue arrives.

I would, however, like to see some lesbian- (preferably) or gay- (if you must) oriented stories. Why is it so difficult to find well-written SF-fantasy with the protagonists with whom I can identify? Any suggestions? If you have any influence with Elizabeth Lynn, tell her the world needs for her to write more.

While I'm thinking of it, do you know where I could order some of her less widely published stuff? Any help would be appreciated.

Many thanks,
D'Arcy von Schultz

(Most books can be obtained directly from the publisher or ordered through a local bookstore which has a copy of Books In Print, which will indicate the title of the work, the author, price and publisher. — Ed.)

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I have been following the comments about the change from placing the address label on the magazine cover to enclosing the entire magazine in a plastic wrapper. I find it hard to believe that readers of a genre that so often deals with future visions can be so short-sighted as to ignore the problems inherent in the disposal of plastic in their local landfill or incinerator.

Until this mailing policy is changed you will be receiving the plastic wrapper in the return mail so that it can be disposed of in your area rather than near my home. I hope that you print this letter so that all the people that share my concern can join in protesting the proliferation of superfluous plastic.

If you continue plasticizing your magazine I will have to reconsider renewing my subscription.

Sincerely,
Linda Hoffman
Glenwood, NY

(It seems every solution to a problem creates another problem Believe me, we share your concern for the environment and as soon as there is a viable alternative available, we'll adopt it. But the first problem is getting the magazine to subscribers in one piece and nothing does that like plastic — which soon may become more biodegradable. In the meantime, all of the plastic on all of the magazines we mail probably doesn't even amount to the plastic output by your nearest McDonald's in one day. — Ed.)

— ABO —

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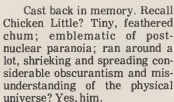
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THROUGH THE LENS

By Susan Ellison

Ghost Writing the Fall Season



Cast back in memory. Recall Chicken Little? Tiny, feathered chum; emblematic of post-nuclear paranoia; ran around a lot, shrieking and spreading considerable obscurantism and misunderstanding of the physical universe? Yes, him.

He should have yelled, "Wolf!" and not merely, "The ceiling's dripping!" because this time he may well have the correct information: insofar as the upcoming television season is concerned, not only is the sky falling, there may not even be a minicam on hand to scope the action. In short, all is frozen in amber in Hollywood, like a stop-motion fantasy. Right now, there may not even be a new season.

At risk: the future of network television as we've come to know it. The overpaid executive positions, the arrogant "programmers" who've lived high off the hog, the domination of American (and foreign) entertainment mediums, the vast Croesus wealth and staggering advertising revenues, the basic conception of how TV should work. It's all up for grabs, and the icebreaker that has plowed through this smug, self-satisfied, lucre-heavy monolith is no less a force than the Writers Guild of America, east and west.

As those who work in film and TV know, it is always the WGA that produces, from its militant (and regular) attempts to improve the terms of the Minimum Basic Agreement (MBA), better and more dignified conditions in the workplace. It is always the WGAE/WGAw that gets royalties and residuals, equal opportunity for minority writers, outlawing of spec writing, proper onscreen

credits, cable and cassette participation ... In short, almost all of the advances for "creative personnel," while the AMPTP (Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers), commonly known as the Alliance, tries to convince the world that no one should pay any attention to the billions of dollars the AMPTP reaps every year. Gilded crybabies, they whine that they are well and truly on the verge of destitution, and all those greedy writers want is an undeserved larger share of their meager fortunes, please turn me so I can evenly on both sides. If you believe that, then you probably also believe that pigs can fly and that Dino de Laurentiis is the fountainhead of cinematic creativity.

Littera Scripta Manet

But don't despair. For those of you with a sweet tooth for the bizarre and warped, and the inability to watch yet another rerun of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (although during this writer's strike there does seem to be a high percentage of new episodes, have you noticed? Funny that!), a few shows have escaped the Chicken's prophecy of doom.

Thanks to movies such as *Robocop* and *The Hidden*, this season's pickings seem to be a mix'n'match of alien cops (first from the starter's gate was NBC's *Something Is Out There*), robot cops and interplanetary sheriffs, with a splattering of ghoulies to keep you awake nights.

Of the two science fiction/western shows developed by ABC, the one you'll see is *Badlands 2005*. They're playing this one top secret, so all we know

at the moment is that it's set in the American West (presumably in the year 2005) after a cataclysmic drought, and the protagonists are a sheriff and his robot sidekick. I hate to break it to ABC, but the idea of a Western is not an innovative piece of programming; nor is a rehash of the "robot sidekick" theme which ABC did in the TV movie and series *Future Cop*; even that idea was "borrowed" from Harlan Ellison and Ben Bova's story *Brillo*.

The show that ABC didn't pick, and in my mind the one with the more interesting story and greater possibilities, is *Pioneers*, written by Alan Brennert, who was the executive story consultant on the revived *Twilight Zone* series.

Pioneers opens 200-300 years in the future. Homesteaders have colonized the planet Farhaven. The heroine, Melinda Frank, takes over as colony marshal when her father dies under mysterious circumstances. Unknown to Melinda, her two brothers (one of whom is a xenobiologist, with the ability to project his mind into alien lifeforms), and the colonists, the planet Farhaven occupies the same space (although in a different dimension) as a "phase world." The trouble starts when the inhabitants of the "phase world" invade Farhaven.

Reportedly, after three drafts of the script and ABC deciding they wanted "High Noon in space" (didn't they see *Outland*?) and "more varmints," Brennert left the show in disgust. The script was rewritten once again, this time by Jeff Melvoin, but ABC gave it a pass. Rumor has it that ABC preferred *Pioneers* but

felt *Badlands* 2005 was a better 8 p.m. show for the kiddies.

The nominations in the horror category this year were: *Nightmares*, written by J.D. Feigelson, and *Chain Letter*, written by Bill Bleich and directed by Thomas Wright. And the winner for the most depraved notion to date is ... *Chain Letter*! You're gonna love this one: each week the Angel of Death delivers a chain letter to a guest star. Talk about junk mail!

ABC's science fiction choice for the upcoming months is *Cyberforce: The Next Step*, a futuristic cop show. The producer on the show is Peter Wagg (he produced *Max Headroom*), and the original two-hour pilot was written by Steve Roberts. But don't expect to see the pilot: ABC hated it. All that remains is a 20-minute presentation.

On the CBS list this fall we find: *Hard Times* on the *Planet Earth*, about a humanoid alien sentenced to a prison stretch on good old Terra; *Jake's Journey*, a comedy time-travel series written by Graham Chapman of *Monty Python* fame; *MegaNauts* or *MicroNauts* or *MicroCops* (nobody is quite sure which title they're going to opt for), which is *Innerspace* for TV, produced in conjunction with Industrial Light and Magic; and *Jack The Ripper*, a CBS miniseries, written by Derek Marlowe and produced in association with Euston Films, Thames TV and Hill-O'Connor Entertainment.

Also on the horizon are: *Monsters*, from Laurel Entertainment; *The Ghost Writer*, starring Anthony Perkins; *A Nightmare on Elm Street: Freddy's Nightmares*, with Freddy Krueger hosting an hour-long anthology; and *The War of the Worlds* series, which will premiere in September.

For the kids, and those of you coherent at 8:30 Saturday morning, CBS is airing a new, 13-episode animated *Superman* series. Marv Wolfman, who developed the show (he is also the story editor, and wrote the pilot episode), describes the series as having the action and adventure of the comics and the character of the first *Superman* movie.



Will Christopher Reeve be in *Superman V*?

Possibly joining the Man of Steel on prime-time TV is an animated *Batman* series being developed by ABC, perhaps to tie in with the forthcoming *Batman* theatrical feature.

My picks for the fall: I'm a sucker for a guy in a cape. It's got to be *Superman* and *Batman*.

Now for the movies. (Once the strike is resolved and the studios resume production.)

In order to lure you to your local multiplex this year, filmdom has come to the pecuniary conclusion that what works once will work twice, or even seven times in the case of *Friday the Thirteenth: Part 7*. And it does! The roll call for sequels and remakes throughout the summer is an impressive one, with *Poltergeist III* and *Fright Night: Part II* leading the pack. Following a close third, and ready for an August release, is the fourth *Nightmare on Elm Street* shocker. Back for a return engagement are: *Halloween IV*, starring Donald Pleasance; *Phantasm II*, with James LeGross and Reggie Bannister; *Hellraiser II: Hellbound*, which started shooting in London on January 11; a sequel to *Cocoon*, with most of the original cast reprising their roles, including Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy; *Superman V*, probably without Christopher Reeve; and scheduled for 1989 release is *Indiana Jones Three*, which teams

Harrison Ford with Sean Connery playing his father.

But, topping the *Why did they remake this?* list is the 1988 version of *The Blob*. "It's back, as an exploding, overwhelming force of evil, unleashing an unimaginable fear upon its victims." Simply unimaginable: malevolent bubble gum.

And finally, if there's one film properly called a must-see this summer, it's *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, based on the antic 1981 novel *Who Censored Roger Rabbit?* by Gary K. Wolfe. It's both a live action and animated film, and stars Bob Hoskins, Christopher Lloyd, Daffy Duck, Bugs Bunny, Betty Boop and, of course, Roger Rabbit. And the plot? Not going to utter a word. Just go to the theater with the eyes of a child and prepare to be bamboozled to distraction.

Leave now!

Stop-the-press Update

In the three weeks following the writing of the preceding column — as the Writers Guild of America strike entered its fourth month — the warnings expressed at the beginning of this column became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Only one of the upcoming network series (*Something Is Out There*) for which pilots had been shot, went to series. All is vast emptiness. In September, when you tune in for the "New Season," you will be blessedly rewarded with snow and static.

—ABO— PAGE 57

Cat Scratch

(Continued from page 39)

I did?"

"Hah! As much as anyone else I know. Perhaps you will work for me now." He leaned down and scratched my head.

That spontaneous "purr" welled up and made it very difficult to talk for a while. Finally I got it enough under control to ask one more question.

"Now that we're friends again," I said, "how about doing me a favor?"

I had some unfinished business to attend to. Abraa dropped me off as close to Odin as he could. Over the months I've learned a lot about sneaking around. Loudmouth's security system was easy to get through.

No. I didn't kill him. But I'd like to see the look on his face when he sees that I shit in his favorite chair — again. Hah! Now I can get on with what's left of my life

I just hope Abraa has stocked up on taarn.

— ABO —

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Who Made the Stew on Betelgeuse II?

By Esther M. Friesner

*The time will come, my love, my sweet,
When space-cuisine and ours must meet.
That unsung hero who first ate
The naked oyster on his plate
Will pale as nothing next to he
Who first dines out on Gamma III.
What table manners does one use
With hosts who all are sentient ooze?
Each mouthful brings a subtle test:
Is that your soup or fellow-guest?
And what is worse, my brave gourmet,
Will you be diner or entree?
Recall the famed Columbus, who,
When passed his bowl of Carib stew,
Was told with smiles un-Genoese,
"Admiral, take my husband ... please!"
So who are we to blanch and shake
At what form space-cuisine shall take?
Then to your forks, my bold dragons!
Here's to Centauran macaroons!
The soups of Cygnus and the stews
They serve on distant Betelgeuse!
The "special" of Aldebaran:
The meatloaf that walks like a man!
With napkins tucked, let's boldly chew
Where no man ere ourselves dared do
So someday we may urp with ease
Our way across the galaxies.*

— ABO —

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Harlan Ellison on the New Wave

Our next issue will feature a special guest appearance by Harlan Ellison, who will provide his personal view of the history of the New Wave movement in science fiction. The rebellion by New Wave writers changed the nature of the genre in the 1960s and 1970s. As one of the foot soldiers to survive the trench warfare, Pfc.

Ellison provides some unique insights into what happened in the trenches and why. The next issue will also feature new stories from Patricia Anthony, Robert A. Metzger, Elissa Malcohn, Stephen R. Boyett, and as many more as we can fit.

— ABO —

Alien Publisher

(Continued from page 19)

"Australia, then?" he said.

"When?"

"What?"

"Australia when?"

"Never mind," he said.

"Where can I find this Ryan?"

"You might try the World Science Fiction Convention," I said.

"Oh, I get it," he said, making another note on my form. "Look, buddy. It's been fun. And I appreciate your coming around here to lighten things up a bit, but there's a lot of people waiting."

"When do I get my green card?" I said.

"Great joke," he said. "And I think the frog suit is fantastic, but I've got work to do now, so why don't you move along?"

"What about my green card?" I said.

"They told us there would be some like you," he said, with mounting impatience. "I'm going to get my supervisor."

When he turned away from the counter, I had a strong premonition that I should not wait to see his supervisor. I hopped out of there.

I have been evading the authorities ever since. I moved to a new apartment, and I'm very careful about going out now. After they finished questioning him, Ryan called to apologize. I wouldn't speak to him, of course. He left several messages on my answering machine, but I haven't returned his calls. He even sent over three cans of non-abrasive car wax as a peace offering. That was thoughtful. He knows the abrasive stuff plays hell with my metabolism. It was good wax, but I doubt I'll forgive him. Of course, if he were to send me a bottle of designer cologne and a variety of small appliances, maybe we could talk about it.

— ABO —

Books

(Continued from page 23)

die-class fan who grew up reading every issue of *Astounding* and little else. He was a black kid who

could pass for white, the brilliant son of an undertaker who grew up to be a would-be literary novelist and folksinger who associated with criminals (there's quite a startling anecdote about the murderer, mugger, and rapist who chickened out of meeting Don Wollheim) while exploring what it meant to be gay in New York in the 1960s. The book is deeply introspective, lyrical, honest, and filled with vast numbers of experiences you and I are never likely to share. This was the material from which all Delany's fiction grew.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Anthony writes well about his childhood and early life, but, as he tells us again and again, he doesn't forgive injuries, and, alas, spends a large portion of the book not merely recounting all the fights he's been in, but striking one last blow, impugning the integrity of some of the most honored people in the field, and carrying on his old feuds beyond the point of absurdity. The whole thrust of the book might be summed up as "I was right, you bastards!" Even if one does remember him battling Dean Koontz in the mimeographed pages of *Beabohema* in 1972, this is tedious. For most readers, it will be merely bewildering. People who enjoy Anthony's fiction and hope to learn from this book how it came about are going to be disappointed. There are only interesting bits, including a memoir of the Spanish Civil War by Anthony's mother.

Rating: ☆☆

Noted

The Silver Pillow,
A Tale of Witchcraft
By Thomas M. Disch
Mark V. Ziesing, 1987
48 pp., \$20.00 (signed edition);
\$10.00 (trade edition)

Who is going to pay ten bucks for a short story in book form? The answer: people who appreciate a book itself as an art-object. This is a very handsome edition, not merely small press but

fine press, illustrated by Harry O. Morris. The story is among Disch's best, a barbed, nasty tale about twisted people and, yes, a haunted pillow. It is elegant and memorably vicious.

Rating: ☆☆☆

The Kill Riff
By David Schow
Tor, 1988
406 pp., \$17.95

I mention this because it's being published as a horror novel, and is being pushed heavily to the fantasy audience. As Schow himself noted, there seemed to be five copies of the advance reader's edition to every attendee at the World Fantasy Con last year, where Schow won an award for best short story. I am sure the publishers know what they're doing, because Schow's audience is in the fantasy field, and this book will appeal to a younger, more hip audience than usually reads mysteries — but this is a crime novel, complete with sex, drugs, rock and roll, and car chases. It has no supernatural element. The "horror" is that of *Psycho*, a fine study of a man who has come to terms with himself as a brilliant, psychotic killer, and of a super-macho rock star who finds he must uphold his projected fantasies, even if it means a duel to the death with the aforementioned psychopath. It's gripping, enormously commercial, and will make a great movie, but, you know, there are times when I can't accept that something is a horror novel (or fantasy, or science fiction) merely because it has that label on the spine.

Rating: ☆☆☆

— ABO —

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Good Neighbor

(Continued from page 7)

told me to spend the night. I stayed at his house for two days.

All that winter, seemed like we was joined at the hip. I'd go over to his place, but most times he'd be over at mine. Started knocking on my door, too. If I didn't answer right away, he'd barge right on in. I figured he'd got over thinking bothering people was a sin, but he hadn't. Wasn't till six months later he got up the gumption to tell me he'd been afraid I'd kill myself.

Got to telling me a lot about their way of death, too. Blamed if I didn't start understanding. He started borrowing Maxie's cookbooks and making stuff from scratch, and we'd sit all warm in his kitchen, the smell of fresh baked bread and cookies around us and talk and eat until the thin hours of the morning.

Spring planting come, and I was busy. Helped him get in a garden; he helped me get in mine. When we seen each other, he let me go on and on about Maxie. Never told me to shut up. Never seemed like he was bored. Knewed it must have been tiresome for him, but he hung on every word and never once interrupted. I've had some good neighbors in my time. I've had some good friends. But of all of them, God, wasn't he the best.

In November some four years later he told me to go home and not come back for two weeks. I knowed right then what it was about.

"God damn you to hell," I told him. "I won't do that."

"Billy, you have to," he said.

"You got that wrong. I don't have to do nothing I don't want to."

"No. You really don't. I'm sorry, but I had to ask. You're the only one I have."

That made me mad. "Should have more'n me, after all this time. You been here some fifteen years working for your people and working for ours. Should have more'n me. It just ain't fair."

"I'm not going to debate the unfairness of it with you." He had an elegant way of talking like that, so that sometimes you didn't know if he was mad nor joking till he said something else. "Unfairness has nothing to do with it. Besides, it's unimportant. You're all that I need."

That sort of got to me. "You tell me what to do," I said then. "You let me know if you need anything."

"Just don't forget to check on me. Please don't forget."

I kind of looked at him. I was a little put-out. "You think for one goddamned minute I will?"

"No," he said real soft. "Forgive me. I shouldn't

have said that, but I'm frightened."

Him frightened. That took me back. Didn't know he could be upset nor angry nor scared. "Then I ain't gonna leave you. I'll just stay right here. Ain't gonna let nothing happen to you. You'll see."

"You can't stay," he told me. "It's a private thing with us. I have to have time. Give me two weeks."

"Two weeks," I told him. "Not a minute more."

Two weeks later, I was the one who found him. I was the one who cut him down. When I picked him up in my arms there wasn't much left of him, and what was left didn't have no more weight than paper. The cocoon was so dry and fragile that I broke part of it accidental-like against my chest. I could see some of him inside. Just a glimpse 'cause I didn't want to look too close. But what I seen made me know he hadn't been able to change. Death. It looks the same. No matter what creature it takes, death looks the same.

I done what he expected of me. Took him out and laid him on the grass, real careful so he didn't break. The ground was wet, but I dug a hole, anyways. I laid him down inside and set fire to him like he wanted me to. He'd told me enough of what to expect if he'd made it and what to look for if he hadn't. If he'd made it, I would have lost him the same. If he'd made it, he wouldn't have remembered nothing.

He burned fast. There was something pretty about it, too. The edges of the brown cocoon caught first and spread, sort of curling like dry leaves do. The wind caught at him and lifted bits of him up in the blue dusk. I could see the ashes as they spread along the pasture, with embers falling to the ground, like he was part of the air and the earth at the same time.

Then I called up to their embassy. He'd taught me something to say in his own language, and I said that. Never told me what it meant, but the ambassador on the other end of that phone was quiet for a long time before he put the receiver down. He put it down so soft I didn't never hear the click, only that hum of the empty line.

I went through his house and mine trying to find something that suited him, but I couldn't. I thought of the Oreo jar, and that wasn't him. The vodka and Dr. Pepper wasn't really him, neither. He was a complicated man, and not so easy to sum up as Maxie.

So I wrote this. Talked to Harry Jacobs and his folks over at the paper and they promised to print it. He'd think it didn't matter; but I want people around here, the people who always stared at him, to understand.

Tomorrow morning when that paper's thrown, I'm going to go over to the hole where I burned him. I'm going to sit by that hole for five hours like he done for her. I'll probably read this out loud. He'd tell me that was silly, that he'd been made part and parcel of what is, but you can't never tell.

Anyways, if he's still here and feeling lonely with all them human souls around him, I want him to remember the human who cared. He was a hell of a good neighbor.

— ABO —



Aborigines

(Continued from page 31)

Schwader, who writes full time, just heard that her short story "Old Glass" was accepted by *Eldritch Tales* magazine. She also has a poem titled "Juliet: Lives and Times," appearing in the spring *Small Press Writers and Artists Showcase*, and



David Brian

she's working on an SF novel.

One of her hobbies is writing *Star Trek* fan fiction, and she says she's had a few stories accepted lately.

We welcome a new artist contributor, David Brian, who is the illustrator for "Killing Gramps."

Brian is a young (25) full-time artist who specializes in the SF and fantasy markets. The work he says he is most proud of to date is a National Space Society advertisement and brochure titled "Leonardo's Finale." The ad appeared in *Omni* magazine last November.

He is now working on a series of fantasy paintings that may be used for an art book.

If there's one subject he likes to depict, it's buildings. "I have always been interested in new and old architecture," he says. "I particularly



Bruce Boston

enjoy the chance to paint a futuristic cityscape when it comes along (like the main illustration for "Killing Gramps"). I guess it's the frustrated architect in me."

Bruce Boston makes his second appearance in our magazine with the poem "Against the Ebon Rush of Night."

Boston's "A Hero of the Spican Conflict" in the Nov.-Dec. 1987 issue is

one of five of his poems that have made the preliminary ballot for the Rhysling award, the annual award given by the Science Fiction Poetry Association.



James S. Dorr

Boston says other nominations include Wendy Rathbone's "Flashing the Black Long Streets" which appeared in our Sept.-Oct. 1987 issue, and several poems by ABO contributor Robert Frazier.

Boston's already won the Small Press Writers and Artists Organization's best poet award for 1987.

He has two books of poems coming out this year: *The Nightmare Collector* and *Skin Trades*, and he's working on some collaborative poems with Robert Frazier.

Poet James Dorr brings us the hip "Elemental Vamp." Dorr lives in Indiana and makes his living "believe it or not" as a freelance writer of "primarily business and consumer topics."

He's seen success with his more fanciful writing as well.

A poem of his titled "A Neo-Canterbury Tale: The Hog Drover's Tale" which appeared in the June 1986 *Fantasy Book* was a nominee for last year's Rhysling award.

He's now working on a fantasy short story series "set loosely in the late T'ang Dynasty, China."

And here's a unique hobby. Dorr is the leader of a recorder consort which plays Renaissance dance music. The name of the group is *Die Aufblitzantanztruppe*, which loosely translates to The Flash Dance Band.



Esther M. Friesner

The four band members in their medieval garb have made appearances at Society for Creative Anachronism

affairs and were once billed as an historical exhibit at a military base on Armed Forces Day.

Esther M. Friesner explores culinary tastes in the poem "Who Made the Stew on Betelgeuse II?"

Friesner got her B.A. at Vassar and her Ph.D. in Spanish at Yale.

She won the Romantic Times award for most promising new fantasy writer in 1986. Her latest books are *Elf Defense* (NAL/Signet) out in March, *Here Be Demons* (Ace/Berkley) out in May, and *Druid's Blood* (NAL/Signet) due out in September. There are also three more coming next year.

Among Friesner's hobbies: the Society for Creative Anachronism, writing "pseudo-medieval" plays, and being a colonial camp follower for the Fifth Connecticut Regiment.

Hugo nominees

As I said in the beginning of this column, we here at ABO are just tickled pink that the magazine has been nominated for a Hugo.

And Bob Eggleton isn't the only ABO contributor who's been nominated.

Orson Scott Card, who wrote "Prior Restraint" in our premier issue, has been nominated in two Hugo categories: *Seventh Son* (Tor) for best novel and *Eye for Eye* (Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine) for best novella.

(For Janice Eissen's and Darrell Schweitzer's reviews of *Seventh Son*, see the Jan.-Feb. and March-April 1988 issues.)

Martha Soukup, who wrote "Frenchmen and Plumbers" in the Sept.-Oct. 1987 issue, was nominated for a John W. Campbell Award, which honors new writers.

And there is soon-to-be-a-contributor Harlan Ellison, who has the distinction of competing against himself, so to speak.

A retrospective of his life's work, *The Essential Ellison* (Nemo Press), is nominated for a Hugo in the "other forms" category.

When Schweitzer reviewed *The Essential Ellison* in the Jan.-Feb 1988 issue, he told readers, "If I have to say this is recommended, well... welcome back from Mars. This book should fill you in on some of what American culture's been through while you were gone."

Nominated in the same category as *The Essential Ellison* is a script by Harlan Ellison, "I, Robot: The Movie," which appeared in *Isaac Asimov's* November and December 1987 issues.

Ellison recently won his second Mystery Writers of America Edgar Allan Poe Award for best short story. It was for the story "Soft Monkey," which was simultaneously published in *Mystery Scene Reader* and *Black Lizard Anthology of Crime Fiction* last year.

— ABO —

The Best of Hugo Award Nominee

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- "Prior Restraint" by Orson Scott Card
- "The Milk of Knowledge" by Ian Watson
- "Sing" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch
- "Merchant Dying" by Paul A. Gilster
- "It Came From the Slushpile" by Bruce Bethke
- "An Unfiltered Man" by Robert A. Metzger
- "Containment" by Dean Whitlock
- "Passing" by Elaine Radford
- "What Brothers Are For" by Patricia Anthony
- "The Last Meeting at Olduvai" by Steven R. Boyett
- "Regeneration" by Rory Harper

The special anthology, bound to be a collector's item, retails for \$4.50 at your nearest Waldenbooks or favorite bookstore. If they don't have it, tell them they can order it from Ingram Periodicals, Tel. 1-(800)-759-5000. Or, if you prefer, you can order it direct from us for \$4.50 plus \$1.00 postage and handling. Send your check or money order for \$5.50 to: Aboriginal Science Fiction, P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.

Elemental Vamp

By James Dorr

*A ragtime bone, a hank of hair
made Kipling's vamp — today the breed
needs more.*

*The elemental air
is thin above, its winds unkeyed
to bats' wings: thus, approaching space,
the vampire rests within a seed
or ferro-plastic carapace
(a single coffin-end left clear
for forward view) and, there in place,
with rockets lifting off the fear
of old-time stakes, she sets her aim
at stars. One mirrored glance to rear
suffices for her — set, the game
allows no retromotion.*

*That done
(planetfall accomplished) flame
and earth are simple. Once, a run
beneath the ground had kept her skin
a gentle white: to cope with new suns'
cancerous glare the vamp begins
with modern fabrics — blouses, jeans,
skirts and dresses wispy thin
for comfort. Their reflective sheen
is well in fashion, while a snood,
a hat (wide-brimmed), cosmetic screens,
protect the face and throat, and floods
of cream-like moisteners smooth her hand.*

*Water? Hunger dictates blood,
but humankind, long rich wetland
of juice-filled men, has changed much since:
the fluid she craves is contraband!
Undaunted, she finds evidence
of better fare in DNA
which (having been freeze-dried, condensed,
and recombined in proper way)
provides a rich and meaty soup
and more — a pick-me-up or, say,
a luncheon cocktail rife with groups
of basic proteins.*

*A vampire's handbag
will contain a six-pack or more, plus a scoop
of traditional gear — her nostalgic swag —
a hank of hair,*

a bone,

a rag.

— ABO —

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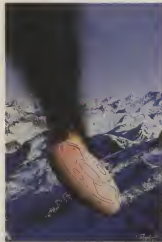
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